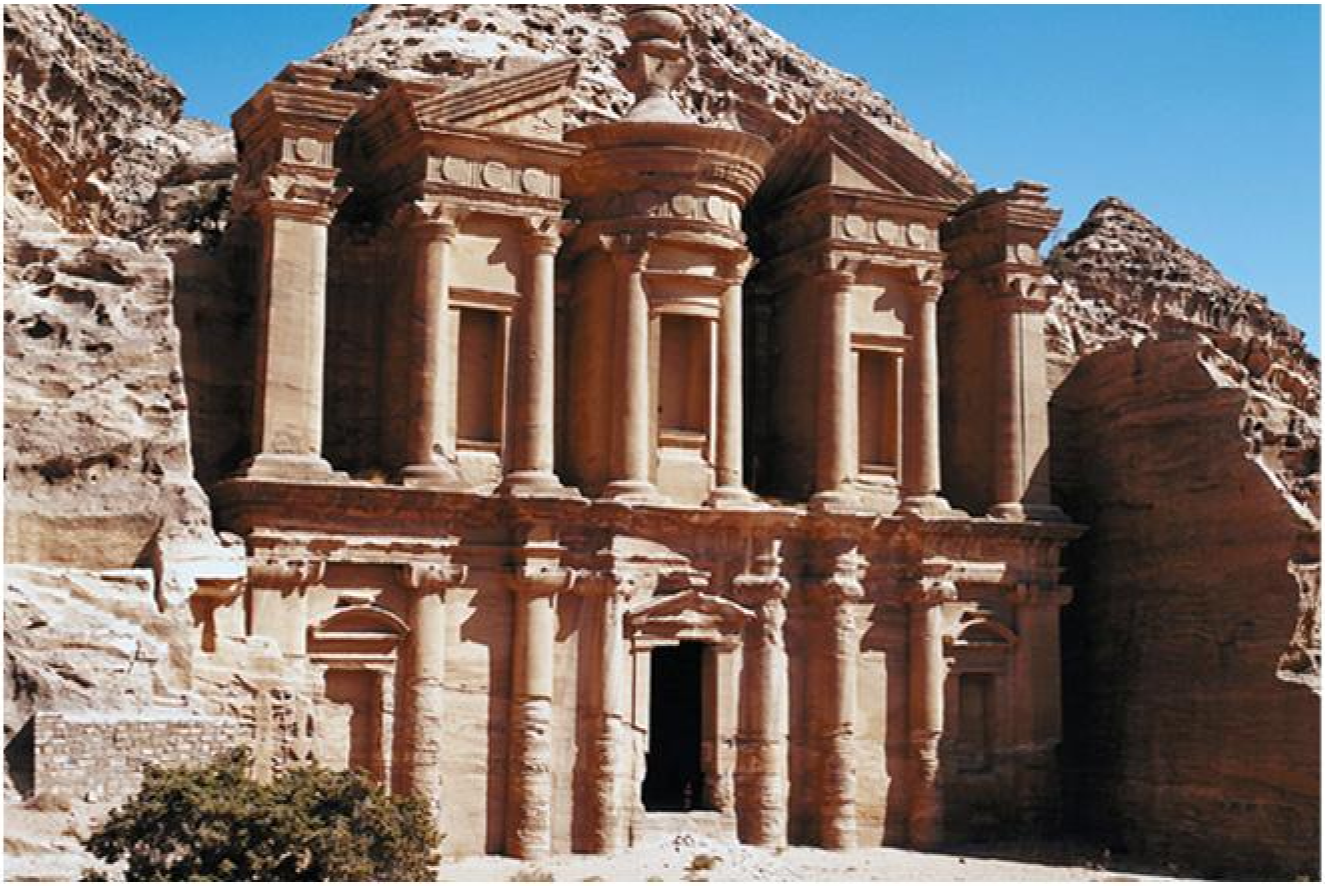
Exploring Jordan

The Other Biblical Land



Exploring Jordan

The Other Biblical Land

About the Biblical Archaeology Society

The excitement of archaeology and the latest in Bible scholarship since 1974

The Biblical Archaeology Society (BAS) was founded in 1974 as a nonprofit, nondenominational, educational organization dedicated to the dissemination of information about archaeology in the Bible lands.

BAS educates the public about archaeology and the Bible through its bi-monthly magazine *Biblical Archaeology Review*, an award-winning web site www.biblicalarchaeology.org, and books and multimedia products (DVDs, CD-ROMs and videos). It also sponsors a wide variety of seminars, tours and cruises that bring leading scholars to general audiences.

The articles in this collection were assembled as a service to those planning to visit that country and also to those who want to learn more about this ancient land which is so rich in Biblical history.

Publishing Excellence

BAS's flagship publication is *Biblical Archaeology Review* (**BAR**). **BAR** is the only magazine that connects the academic study of archaeology to a broad general audience eager to understand the world of the Bible. Covering both the Old and New Testaments, **BAR** presents the latest discoveries and controversies in archaeology with breathtaking photography and informative maps and diagrams. **BAR**'s writers are the top scholars, the leading researchers, the world renowned experts. **BAR** is the only nonsectarian forum for the discussion of Biblical archaeology.

BAS produced two other publications, *Bible Review* from 1985–2005, and *Archaeology Odyssey* from 1998–2006. The complete editorial contents of all three magazines are available online in the BAS Archive, www.basarchive.org. The BAS Archive also contains the text of five highly-acclaimed books, *Ancient Israel*, *Aspects of Monotheism*, *Feminist Approaches to the Bible*, *The Rise of Ancient Israel* and *The Search for Jesus*. The BAS Archive is available through various colleges, universities, churches and other institutions. Individual users may access the same extensive body of materials in the BAS Library, www.biblicalarchaeology.org/library.

Widespread Acclaim

The society, its magazine, and its founder and editor Hershel Shanks have been the subject of widespread acclaim and media attention in publications as diverse as *Time*, *People*, *Civilization*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Jerusalem Post*. BAS has also been featured on television programs aired by CNN, PBS and the Discovery Channel. To learn more about the Biblical Archaeology Society and subscribe to *Biblical Archaeology Review*, go to www.biblicalarchaeology.org.

The articles in this collection originally appeared in Archaeology Odyssey and Biblical Archaeology Review.

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INTRODUCTION

Exploring Jordan

The Other Biblical Land

Steven Feldman

Welcome to Jordan, the other Biblical land! Other than Israel, no country has as many Biblical sites and associations as Jordan: Mount Nebo, from where Moses gazed at the Promised Land he could not enter; Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John baptized Jesus; Lot's Cave, where Lot and his daughters sought refuge after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; Madaba, home of a stunning mosaic map of the Holy Land; the lands of the ancient kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom, and many more.

We've put together this e-book of articles on ancient Jordan to introduce readers to this ancient land. Each article is written by an expert who is able to act as a virtual tour guide sharing the depth of their experience and knowledge. This vicarious journey brings to vibrant life the Biblical world in the "other" Holy Land and acquaints us with magnificent sites and legendary stories.

We begin with "Where John Baptized," by Rami Khouri, a longtime archaeology journalist. Khouri takes us to a site on the east bank of the Jordan River and about 7 miles north of the Dead Sea that is believed to have been "Bethany beyond the Jordan," where the New Testament says Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. As Khouri explains, the site became available for archaeological study only in recent years (it had previously been closed off by the Jordanian army as a military zone). Khouri recounts the New Testament description of Jesus' baptism and then examines ancient maps and the writings of ancient travelers to explain why the site is indeed the ancient Bethany beyond the Jordan. He then walks us through the site, describing the remains of an impressive Byzantine-era monastery featuring at least four churches, one of which is built around a cave that ancient pilgrims called "the cave of John the Baptist." Most

intriguingly, the site contains the remains of stone vessels of the type known from first-century A.D. Jewish sites and which are likely the kind used at the wedding at Cana, where Jesus is said to have turned water into wine.

Next we visit "Rabbath of the Ammonites" with Timothy P. Harrison. Today the area is known as the Citadel and overlooks modern Amman, but during the Biblical period the site was the capital of one of ancient Israel's great enemies, the Ammonites. Harrison traces the history of this ancient city and at the same time reviews the Biblical-era animosities between Israel and Ammon that often brought the two kingdoms into armed conflict. Rounding out this survey is a sidebar by Harrison on the history of excavations at Rabbath Ammon and another by epigrapher (a specialist in writing) P. Kyle McCarter that describes the numerous examples of Ammonite inscriptions that have survived into modern times.

Our immersion in the history of Amman continues with "Philadelphia of the Decapolis," by Alastair Northedge, which examines the city's history in the period just before, during and after the New Testament era. Northedge guides us through the new areas to which the city expanded in the third century B.C. and describes it during the early Roman period, when it was part of the Decapolis, a league of ten cities mentioned in the New Testament. Northedge then brings to life the many glorious structures built here during the Roman period and during the era of Muslim rule.

We then "travel" further south to explore the kingdom of Moab, east of the Dead Sea. In "Moab Comes to Life," P. M. Michèle Daviau and Paul-Eugène Dion introduce us to another important kingdom with which ancient Israel interacted during the Biblical period. Daviau and Dion describe the gods of ancient Moab and then recount the excavation of the first Moabite temple ever discovered by archaeologists. The temple was found complete with gates, altars and an industrial area. Our introduction to Moab is rounded out with a sidebar discussing the enigmatic Moabite god Kemosh.

We conclude this virtual tour with a history of Jordan's most stunning site, and one of the most spectacular places on earth: Petra. Joseph J. Basile describes "When People Lived at Petra," the site in southern Jordan whose amazing rock-cut facades were made famous in the Indiana Jones movies. Basile begins in pre-historic times but quickly brings us to the second century B.C., when the Nabateans established a kingdom in the area. It was the Nabateans who carved the imposing structures for which Petra is known. Supplementing the main article on Petra are two sidebars, one on the 19^{th}-century European rediscovery of Petra and the other on a group of burned scrolls from Petra that are being painstakingly reconstructed.

This collection of articles can only serve as an introduction to the rich history of Jordan. We hope it inspires you to learn more about this important Biblical land.

Where John Baptized

Bethany beyond the Jordan

By Rami Khouri

It may or may not be the spot in the Jordan River where John the Baptist baptized Jesus, but Byzantine Christians seemed to think it was.

And it's not on the western shore of the river, but on the eastern shore—in modern Jordan.

When it comes to locating places mentioned in the Gospels, the Byzantine Christians are often worth taking seriously. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was built on the supposed site of Jesus' tomb only in the fourth century A.D., and for many years its identification was thought to be improbable, if not fanciful, because it was deep inside Jerusalem's Old City walls. (In ancient times, graves were typically outside a city's walls.) But the Byzantine identification has now been confirmed archaeologically.[a]

For a long time the archaeological evidence for the place of Jesus' baptism could not be explored because it was in a Jordanian military area. Now, since the Jordan-Israel peace treaty of 1994, the Jordanians have painstakingly cleared nearby mine fields and


Jordan Tourism Board

The remains of a Byzantine-era (324–638 A.D.) monastery complex form part of Jordan's new Baptism Archaeological Park, which runs along the Wadi el-Kharrar, visible just above the ruins, and abuts the Jordan River. Author Rami Khouri explains how evidence recently found at the tell, including ample signs of Roman-era (37 B.C.-324 A.D.) settlement, identifies the site as "Bethany beyond the Jordan," where John baptized Jesus.

Garo Nalbandian



The photo shows pilgrims gathering on both banks of the Jordan River to mark the baptism; those standing on the left are in Israel, those on the right are in Jordan. Until the 1994 peace treaty between the two countries, the Jordanian side was hemmed in with land mines, making it off limits to archaeologists and pilgrims alike.

the area is once again accessible to archaeologists, pilgrims and tourists. It is this new archaeological evidence that suggests we have indeed located the site called "Bethany beyond the Jordan" in the Gospel of John.

With its new visitor center, the site is fast becoming a major destination for Christian pilgrims from around the world. Located about 7 miles north of the Dead Sea, it is easily reachable from both Jordan and Israel. It is about a 40-minute drive from Amman and two hours by car from Jerusalem.



In the Jubilee Year 2000, Pope John Paul II visited this site during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and it has been designated by the Catholic bishops of the Middle East as one of five pilgrimage sites in Jordan.[b]

In the Gospel of John, Pharisees from Jerusalem visit John at the place where he is baptizing. They want to know whether John thinks of himself as the Messiah or perhaps as Elijah (who will return to announce the Messiah).

John answers them, "'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan where John was baptizing" (John 1:26–28). (This "Bethany beyond the Jordan" should not be confused with the Bethany on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, which was the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.)

In a later incident, Jesus escapes from hostile Pharisees in Jerusalem and again goes "across the Jordan to the place where John at first baptized" (John 10:40). This site, too, appears to be located on the east bank of the Jordan; it is "across" the river if you are coming from Jerusalem and seems to be the same place earlier called "Bethany beyond the Jordan."

In the first chapter of John's gospel, in the paragraph immediately following the reference to "Bethany beyond the Jordan," the text describes the descent of the Spirit on Jesus:

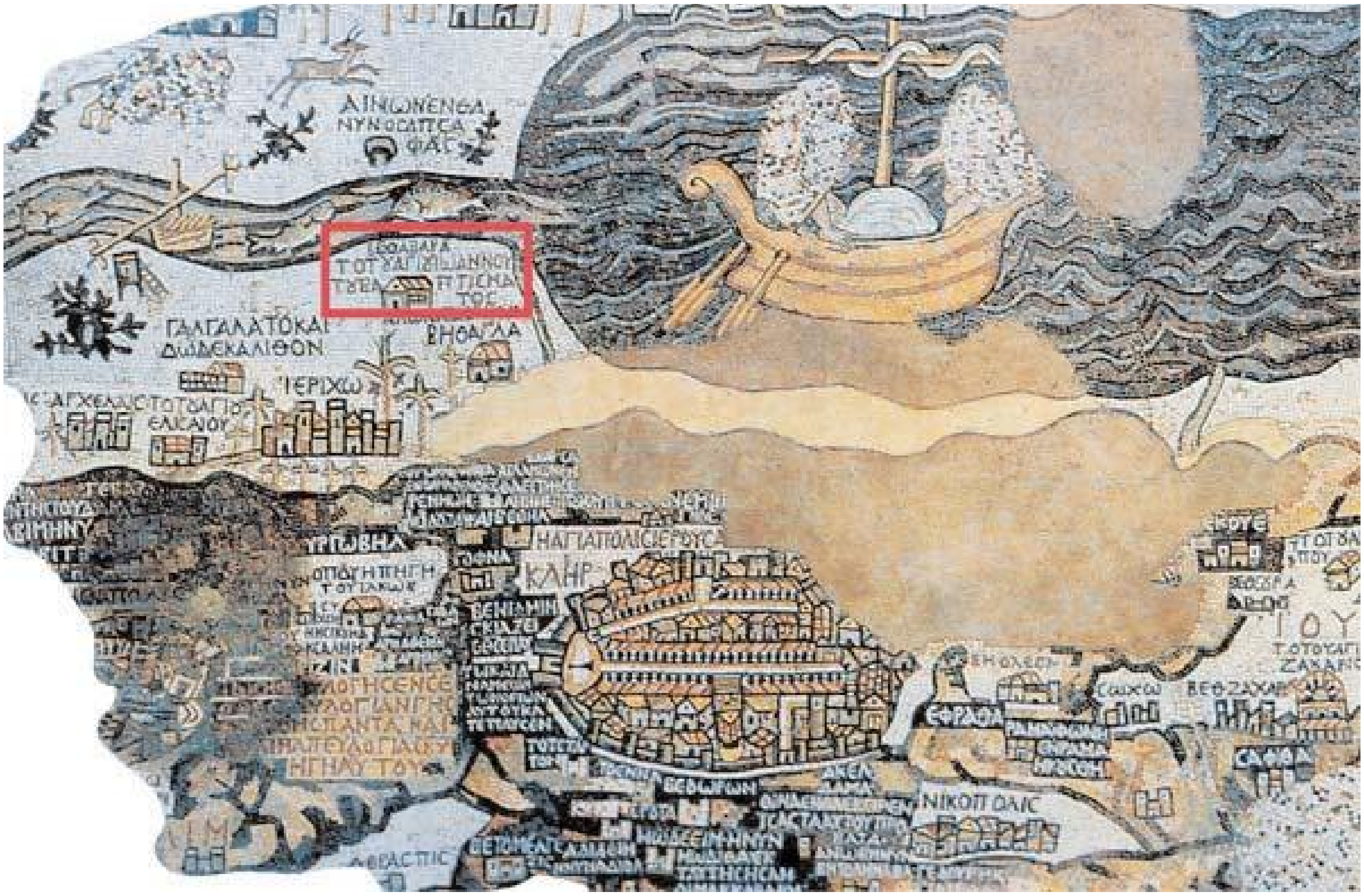
> And John (the Baptist) testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."
>
> (John 1:32–34)

This passage represents the first—and perhaps the only—explicit Biblical reference to the manifestation of the Holy Trinity. The Baptist describes what he saw and heard when he baptized Jesus: In this description the Father speaks from Heaven, the Son is baptized and the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove.

Here, too, John first calls Jesus "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 35) and Jesus attracts his first disciples from among John's followers (John 1:34–51).

It is, however, by no means universally accepted that "Bethany beyond the River" is on the east bank of the Jordan. Two of the most widely used Biblical dictionaries, the HarperCollins Bible Dictionary and the Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, tell us that the location of "Bethany beyond the Jordan" is "unknown." And the famous Madaba map, a partially destroyed sixth-century mosaic map in a church in Madaba, Jordan,[c] seems to locate it west of the Jordan River. I say "seems," not because there is any doubt as to the location west of the river, but because it is not called by the appellation "Bethany beyond the Jordan." It is called Beth Abara, instead of Bethany. In the third century, the church father Origen, unable to locate the Bethany referred to in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, somewhat arbitrarily suggested emending the text to read "Beth Abara across the Jordan." Beth Abara means "House of the Crossing," possibly identifying a ford in the Jordan. A site of that name does appear in the Talmud. Following Origen, Eusebius in his *Onomasticon* (early fourth century) also refers only to this name, spelling it Bethaabara. In Jerome's *Liber Locorum* (late fourth century) he calls the site Bethabara. Most of the ancient manuscripts, such as the major codices known as Vaticanus and Sinaiticus (fourth-fifth centuries), read Bethany in John 1:28. Nevertheless, Beth Abara apparently caught on and it is used in the Syriac version of the Gospels. And Beth Abara, not Bethany, appears on the Madaba map—on the west

Garo Nalbandian



The sixth-century A.D. mosaic map found in a church in Madaba, Jordan, perpetuates one of the rival traditions concerning the location of the Biblical "Bethany beyond the Jordan." (On the map, north is at left, the Dead Sea is at upper right and the Jordan runs north from the sea; the large oval at lower center is Jerusalem.) The map locates Bethany on the west side of the Jordan River (highlighted in red). However, it identifies it not as Bethany but as "Bethabara, the place of the baptism of St. John," following the church father Origen, who could not locate the Bethany described by the New Testament and arbitrarily suggested that the text really meant Beth Abara (House of Crossing), referring to a ford across the river.

side of the Jordan. Beneath the name Beth Abara is a three-line legend in red telling us that this is the site of "The Baptism of St. John."

Perhaps the Madaba map mosaicist, who lived east of the Jordan, understood "beyond" the river to mean west of the river—though for the original writer of the Gospel of John, "beyond" the Jordan clearly meant east of the Jordan River.

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) mention Jesus' baptism (Matthew and Mark mention that it is by John; Luke does not), but none of them indicates whether it occurred on the western or eastern shore of the Jordan (Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22). However, it seems likely that it would have been on the eastern shore. Jesus was coming from Galilee (again, explicit in Matthew and Mark). The normal route through the Decapolis (a group of ten Roman cities in the region) from



Galilee would bypass a hostile Samaria by crossing the Jordan and proceeding south on the eastern side of the river.

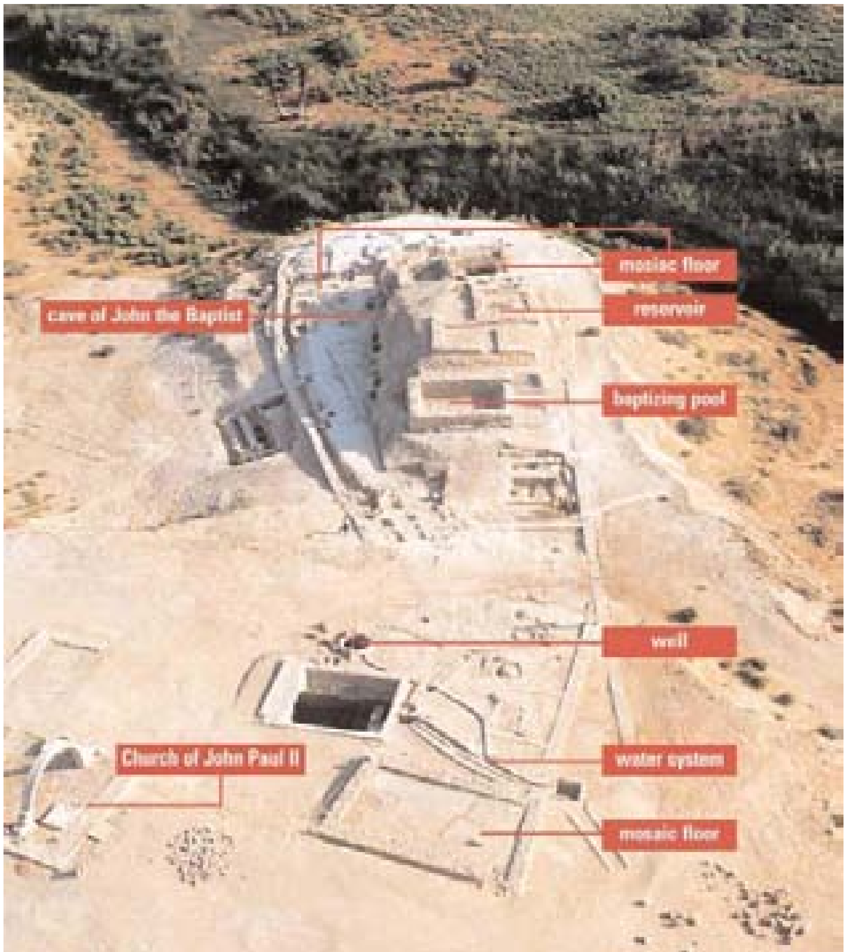
Despite the Madaba map's location of Beth Abara west of the Jordan, many other ancient authorities have the Baptist living and baptizing on the east side of the Jordan. In the early fourth century, Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, crossed the Jordan River and visited the cave where John the Baptist was said to have lived. Eusebius reports that she built a church there.

In about 530 A.D. the archdeacon Theodosius traveled to Palestine as a pilgrim and de-scribed a square-shaped church built on arched arcades and containing a marble column with an iron cross marking the spot where Jesus was baptized. The church was built on arches to allow water to pass underneath, but it succumbed to the Jordan River's periodic floods and eventually collapsed. The site is east of the Jordan.

An early Christian tradition associated Jesus' crossing of the Jordan with an Old Testa-ment parallel: Just as Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan into the Promised Land, so Jesus would cross the Jordan to lead the New Israel to salvation.[1] Pilgrim tradition identifies the same site on the Jordan for both Joshua's crossing and Jesus' baptism. This tradition, as we will see, will help us identify the recent archaeological excavations as "Bethany beyond the Jordan."

Another Old Testament parallel involves the prophet Elijah and his disciple and successor Elisha. Elisha insists on accompanying his teacher as Elijah goes from place to place, finally reaching the Jordan River. All know that the end of Elijah's life is near. When they get to the Jordan, Elijah rolls up his mantle and strikes the water, which miraculously divides so that the two men cross on dry land. On the other side of the Jordan, a fiery horse-drawn chariot sweeps Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:4–14). The anonymous Pilgrim of Bordeaux (writing in 333) locates our site as the place where Elijah ascended to heaven. Ever since the Byzantine period, the main mound at the site we will explore here has been called Elijah's Hill (*Tell Mar Elias* in Arabic).

Jordan Tourism Board



The monastery complex at Tell el-Kharrar contains several Byzantine-era churches as well as an elaborate water system that incorporated reservoirs, springs, wells and pools. A key focus of the site was a cave (upper left in photo) that was alleged to have been used by John the Baptist to conduct baptisms. Excavators here also uncovered numerous remains indicating settlement during the Roman era and as far back as the late Hellenistic period (second century B.C.). In the plan above, the monastery is at right.

The site now proposed as "Bethany beyond the Jordan" has been of archaeological interest since 1899 when Father Federlin, of Jerusalem, first investigated the site. He described a multi-church complex, including a church built on arches reminiscent of the arched church that Theodosius saw in 530 A.D.

Rami Khouri



The large pool above is one of many that were part of the monastery complex at Wadi el-Kharrar. Used either for water storage or for baptism, the pools were fed by channels (visible in the foreground) leading water from spring sources.

The site, today called the Baptism Archaeological Park, runs along a 1.5-mile-long wadi, the Wadi el-Kharrar. This perennial stream and riverbed runs from Tell el-Kharrar in the east to the Jordan River in the west. From 1996 to 2002 the area was excavated by Mohammad Waheeb of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities. On the tell, Waheeb's team explored a Byzantine monastery as well as early-Roman-era remains. Adjacent to the Jordan River, Waheeb's team has excavated a large multichurch complex from the Byzantine era. In

between are several smaller Byzantine chapels, monks' hermitages, caves, hermit cells, ceramic pipelines, large plastered pools and at least two caravanserai for pilgrims stopping here on their way to Mount Nebo, from whie site as "Bethany beyond the Jordan."



Suzanne Singer

Excavation of the site was led by Mohammad Waheeb of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities.

There were at least four churches in the monastery, as well as a sophisticated water conveyance and storage system, three pools and a surrounding wall designed mainly to prevent erosion of the tell rather than to offer protection.

The partly preserved mosaic floor of the main church includes a five-line Greek inscription near the altar area that reads: "By the help of the grace of Christ our God the whole monastery was constructed in the time of Rhotorios, the most God-beloved presbyter and abbot. May God the savior give him mercy."



Rami Khouri

The mosaic floor of the main church in the monastery complex bears a five-line Greek inscription that reads, "By the help of the grace of Christ our God the whole monastery was constructed in the time of Rhotorios, the most God-beloved presbyter and abbot. May God the savior give him mercy."

Another church in the monastery complex is built around a cave containing natural spring water—probably the same cave that Byzantine pilgrims called "the cave of John the Baptist." The cave was transformed into the apse of a church in the Byzantine period; a wall with a door was built in front of the cave to form a chancel screen separating the main hall of the church (the nave) from the altar in the apse. Still visible are the square bases of the stone arches that supported the roof of the church nave.

An intriguing feature discovered during excavation of this cave-church is a manmade water channel that started at the front of the

Rami Khouri



The primary focus of the site in ancient times was the church built around a cave, which uses the cave as its apse. Christian tradition identified the cave as the dwelling place of John the Baptist.

cave with spring water and traveled about 20 feet before spilling into the south bank of the Wadi el-Kharrar. The channel measures 10 inches wide and 6 inches deep, and is still covered in places with stone slabs. The water channel was cut into the marl beneath the floor of the church and lined with a lime plaster that is distinctively Byzantine in style and color. This channel may have carried away spring water used for baptisms inside the church or possibly the spring water that flowed naturally from the cave.

Beneath the mosaic floor of this church, buried in a small pit covered with a limestone capstone, was the skull of a man about 20 years old. As a result of a rare natural condition, the shape of a cross forms where the plates at the back of the skull converge. Waheeb suggests this may be why the skull was thought to be significant and why it merited a special burial place. He adds that the skull may have belonged to the priest Rhotorios, who founded the monastery.

An aqueduct from more distant springs brought water to three plastered rectangular pools within the monastery walls. Scholars are divided over whether these were baptism pools or water storage tanks. A wide staircase across the entire eastern side of the southern pool may be a telltale sign that it was a baptism facility. Smaller staircases provided access into the two other pools—perhaps further evidence of their use in baptism rituals. Storage tanks did not need wide staircases that take up so much space.

Turning from the tell to the shore of the Jordan, Waheeb's team searched for the

Rami Khouri



Though now a short distance from the tell, the Jordan River was once much closer—and sometimes too close—to the monastery complex. Half the chapel in the photograph was washed away in antiquity.

remains of the Church of St. John the Baptist built by St. Helena in the early fourth century and seen by the pilgrim Theodosius in about 530 A.D. The remains they discovered conform exactly to what the Byzantine texts described—a church built on arches, east of the river. The arches collapsed centuries ago and the stones now lie on the ground. There are in fact three churches at this site, superimposed on one another. Tradition has it that the church stands on the spot where Jesus left his clothes during his baptism.


Rami Khouri

Many pilgrims apparently preferred manmade pools to the river currents; the steps leading into the pool in the picture indicate that it was used for baptisms.

In 1998, Waheeb discovered a fourth church near the shore—actually a chapel measuring just 13 by 20 feet—east of the three superimposed churches. A corridor-like structure with a marble staircase descends some 100 feetfrom the east side of the church of St. John the Baptist. The staircase includes 22 steps made of black marble. Its bottom has not yet been reached, though the lowest level excavated so far is already below the level of the water of the Jordan River. The small chapel is located just above what would be the end of the staircase. Pottery sherds found in the staircase excavation and the construction techniques both suggest a sixth-century date for the stairs. The walls of the staircase are inscribed with several crosses. That the steps descend lower than the level of the Jordan River suggests that the staircase was designed for pilgrims descending into the waters of the Jordan River for baptism.

This hypothesis may seem to be contradicted by the fact that today the river is about 300 feet from the stairs. In antiquity, however, the stairs may have led directly into the river. The Jordan is known to have changed its course many times in antiquity, due to heavy seasonal flooding in winter and spring. These floods no longer occur because the water is trapped by dams in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Israel. Today the Jordan is merely a trickle, but from Jesus' time until the mid-20th century it annually expanded to nearly a mile wide.

The archaeologists have not yet found a sign at the site reading "Bethany beyond the Jordan," but from all the evidence, both ancient and modern, it does appear that it has now been located.

Notes

a. See Dan Bahat, "Does the Holy Sepulchre Church Mark the Burial of Jesus?" **BAR** 12:03.
b. The other four are Mount Nebo; Mukawir (Machaerus), the Herodian palace where tradition says John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded; Tell Mar Elias, a site associated with the prophet Elijah's birth; and the Sanctuary of our Lord of the Mountain in Anjara.
c. On the Madaba map, see "Jerusalem as Mosaic," **BAR** 24:02.

1. Compare with Raymond E. Brown, *John I-XII*, Anchor Bible Series (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 44.

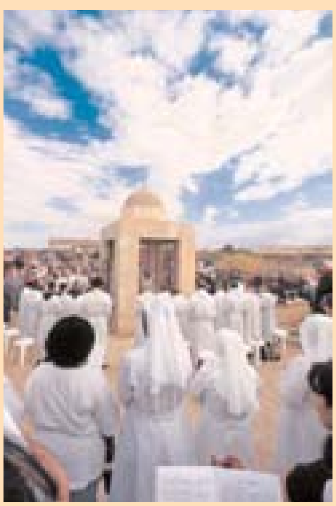
West Side Story



Garo Nalbandian

As Rami Khouri explains in the accompanying article, the location of "Bethany beyond the Jordan" has perplexed writers and pilgrims since almost the dawn of Christianity. Arguments were advanced for locating the place of Jesus' baptism on the eastern shore of the Jordan, and just as many claims were made for locating it on the western shore.

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, author of the highly regarded guidebook *The Holy Land*, notes that the question may well be moot: In the past 2,000 years the Jordan has changed course repeatedly. People kept building monuments relative to the river, meaning that, as the river shifted back and forth, the location of monuments multiplied, creating, over time, a plethora of sites clustered in the same general vicinity but straddling the Jordan. Pilgrims who went to the site at any given moment could consequently find buildings on either side of the river, adding confusion to uncertainty.



Garo Nalbandian

Today the question of which side of the river Biblical Bethany was on has political implications; the eastern shore belongs to Jordan while the western shore belongs to Israel—two countries that until relatively recently were enemies and, at least officially, in a state of war.

Happily, that state of war no longer exists. Pilgrims and tourists have easy access to either bank of the Jordan River. Khouri's article describes the facilities now accessible to visitors on the Jordanian side, but the Israeli side has long drawn a large share of pilgrims. Available to them are a number of chapels built by the larger Christian denominations present in Israel: Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Armenian and Abyssinian, to name just the most prominent. The photo above shows a group of nuns gathering for prayer at the Catholic chapel; below, a group of Abyssinian pilgrims gather at the bank of the river.

Murphy-O'Connor points out that pilgrims coming from Jerusalem's holy sites went to the west side of the Jordan because that was the side closest to them; pilgrims from Jordan or Syria had easier access to the eastern shore. But what has really mattered most to pilgrims, Murphy-O'Connor argues, is the water of the Jordan River.

Ultimately, what has been true for millennia is true today: The true holy site is the river itself.

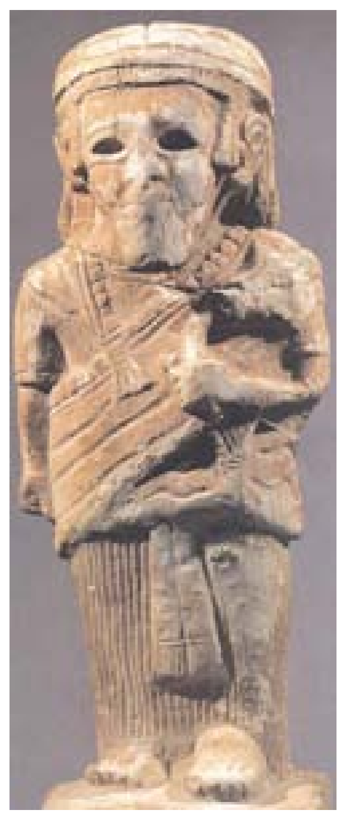
“Rabbath of the Ammonites”

By Timothy P. Harrison

Rabbath Ammon it was called in ancient times, a place-name we might translate as the Ammonite Heights. During the Iron Age, it was the capital of the kingdom of Ammon, rival of the biblical Israelites.

The remains of the ancient Ammonite acropolis are perched atop a rocky outcrop overlooking the bustling capital of modern Amman, Jordan. Known today as Jebel al-Qal’a, or the Citadel, the hill is an L-shaped plateau of about 40 acres divided into three levels, or terraces. Precipitous wadis (dry river beds) surround the plateau on all sides except the north. Below the southern flank—the long east-west base of the L—flows the Sayl Amman, which joins the Wadi Zarqa (referred to in the Bible as the Jabbok River) in its tortuous descent to the Jordan Valley.

The Ammonites were the descendents of Semitic groups that had occupied the area of Transjordan around Amman at least since the mid-second millennium B.C.E. The Bible, written from an adversarial viewpoint, identifies them more specifically as descendants of Ben-ammi, who was born of an incestuous union between a drunken Lot and his younger daughter (Genesis 19:38). In the period of the Judges, the Israelite commander Jephthah crossed the Jordan River “to attack the Ammonites, and the Lord delivered them into his hands” (Judges 11:32). Before the battle, Jephthah swore an oath that in return for a victory over the Ammonites he would sacrifice the first thing to greet him when he returned home—a compulsive vow that forced him to commit an unthinkable act:



Erich Lessing

This small statue of an Ammonite king was excavated on the Amman Citadel (see photo of Amman Citadel). An inscription on the statue’s pedestal identifies the figure as “Yarah-azar, son of Zakir, son of Shanib.” The king’s grandfather, Shanib, is probably the Ammonite king “Sanipu” listed on an inscription of the Assyrian emperor Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.E.).

> When Jephthah arrived home in Mizpah, it was his daughter who came out to meet him with tambourines and dancing. She was his only child; apart from her he had neither son nor daughter. At the sight of her, he tore his clothes and said, “Oh, my daughter, you have broken my heart!” … And he fulfilled the vow he had made (Judges 11:34–39).

Indeed, the long arc of Ammonite history parallels that of the biblical Israelites—not surprisingly, since Amman is less than 50 miles from Jerusalem. Both flourished during the Iron Age (c. 1000–600 B.C.E.), fell to the Babylonians in the early sixth century B.C.E., and then submitted to Persian domination.

In the Hellenistic period, Rabbath Ammon was rebuilt and renamed Philadelphia, after Philadelphus II (285–246 B.C.E.), one of the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt. Later, as the capital of the Roman province of Arabia, established in 106 C.E., Philadelphia grew dramatically, sprawling off the Citadel and into the surrounding valleys. It was during this period that many of the town’s civic structures were built along the Sayl Amman, including the spectacular theater and forum still visible today.

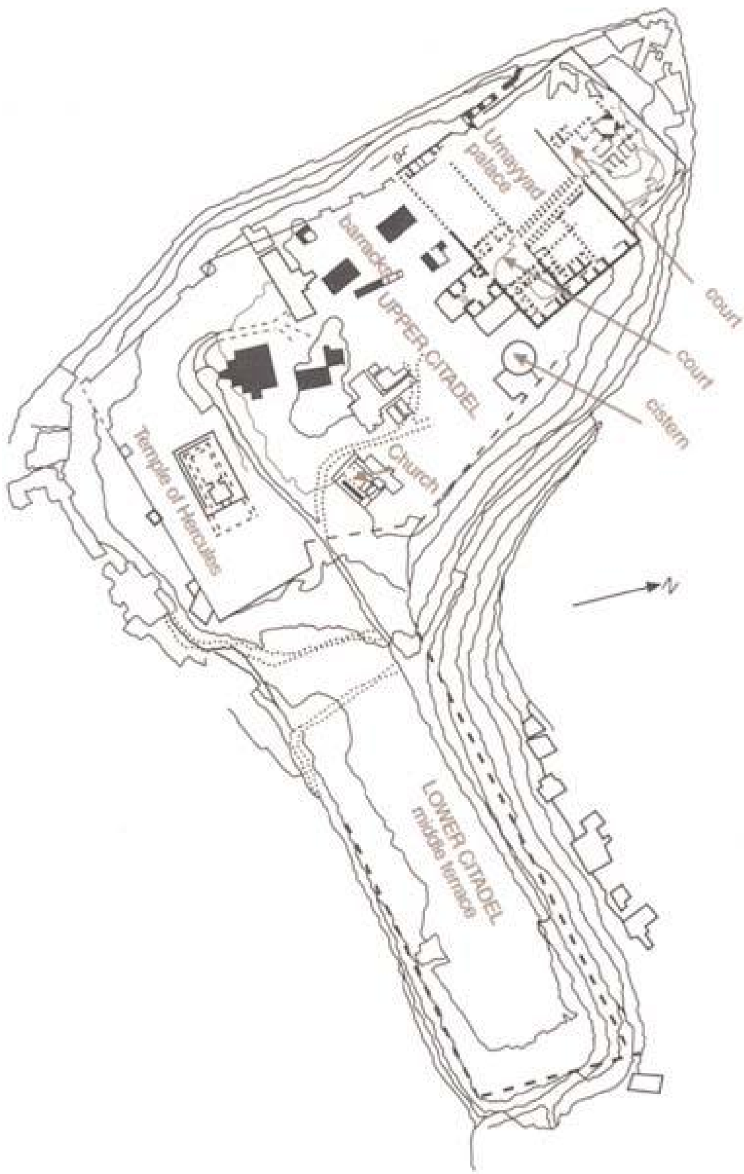
The town continued to prosper in the early Islamic period under the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 C.E.), when Philadelphia was renamed Amman—the Arabic form of the ancient name. Ruling from Damascus, the Umayyads established Amman as a seat of provincial governors, one of whom built a luxurious palace on the Citadel.

With the rise of the Abassid Caliphate (750–974 C.E.) in Baghdad, Amman became less important and fell into decline. In the early 14th century C.E., the Arab geographer Abu al-Fida reported that Amman lay completely in ruins.[a]

Over the millennia, the Citadel’s inhabitants tended simply to remove earlier structures and build new ones on the natural bedrock. This means that very little has been preserved from the earliest periods. The site’s natural defensive position high on the outcrop and its proximity to dependable sources of water continued over the millennia to make it an attractive location.

It appears that the Citadel was first occupied in the Neolithic period, around 7,000 years ago. Excavators have also found pottery fragments dating to the Chalcolithic period (4500–3100 B.C.E.) and Early Bronze Age (3150–2200 B.C.E.), though these sherds were discovered in secondary or tertiary contexts. The most secure evidence suggests that the early settlement was confined to the lowest terrace of the Citadel. However, a number of caves cut into the slopes of the upper terrace contained pottery dating to the end of this period (c. 2200–2000 B.C.E.), perhaps indicating a shift in settlement to the higher level at this time.

The remains of substantial fortification walls and a glacis (a sloping rampart) date to the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1550 B.C.E.). The glacis formed part of an elaborate defensive system along the northern edge of the upper terrace, the only part of the Citadel not protected by a steep ravine. The middle and upper terraces were probably enclosed by walls as well.



Plan of the Amman Citadel

Archaeologists have also uncovered three Middle Bronze Age tombs containing a wealth of artifacts: pottery vessels, scarabs, cylinder seals, ivory inlay, alabaster jars and metal objects. These tombs were cut into the southern part of the upper terrace, near a structure that may have been a temple. Although the Roman-period inhabitants leveled this entire area to build the huge Temple of Hercules, the Middle Bronze Age tombs and the apparent absence of other contemporaneous remains suggest that the upper terrace was considered a sacred precinct. This interpretation was strengthened by the discovery in 1987 of a large stone wall separating the upper terrace from the rest of the settlement, creating a kind of protected zone.

Surprisingly, all we have from the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 B.C.E.) settlement are some pottery sherds. If the Citadel was occupied during this period, it clearly did not support the sizable population that lived, worshiped and died there in the Middle Bronze Age. Rabbath Ammon does not appear, for example, on a list of Canaanite toponyms recorded by the Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III (1479–1425 B.C.E.) at Karnak—even though the pharaoh does mention several nearby sites, such as *Krmn* (possibly Tell al-'Umayri, south of Amman). Perhaps during this period a smaller settlement simply shifted to the currently inhabited—and thus unexcavated—part of the lower terrace (see plan of Philadelphia of the Decapolis in "Philadelphia of the Decapolis").

What we do have, however, is an impressive Late Bronze Age building, possibly a temple, located a few miles east of the Citadel on the grounds of the former Amman civil airport. Discovered in 1955 during an expansion of the airport runway, this structure was made of stone and almost perfectly square, measuring close to 50 feet on a side. The building resembles an Egyptian-style residence from the Amarna period

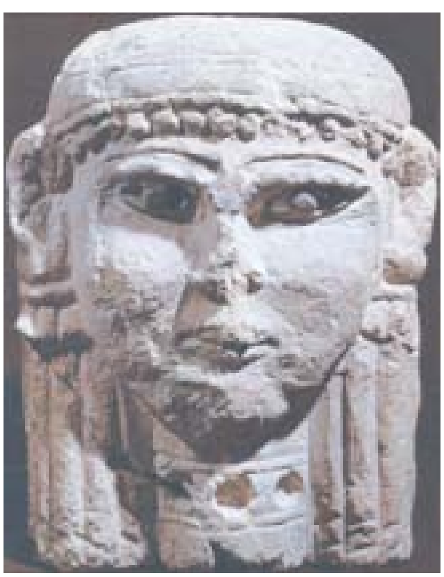
(14th century B.C.E.), and it contained a rich assortment of non-local pottery, stone vessels and jewelry, some imported from as far away as Egypt, Cyprus and the Aegean. The complex also produced large quantities of charred human bones, perhaps from cremation, identifying it as a possible mortuary temple.

In 1940, after completing a series of arduous treks across the rugged Transjordanian highlands, the American rabbi Nelson Glueck published an archaeological history of the region. In *The Other Side of the Jordan*, he argued that the highlands were virtually devoid of human populations for most of the second millennium B.C.E.; only with the onset of the Iron Age, around 1200 B.C.E., did people begin settling in the region. Glueck explained this growth as the emergence of the biblical kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom. He identified Ammon as a territory consisting of a series of hilltop towers guarding the approaches to the foothills around the capital, Rabbath Ammon. Glueck maintained that these defensive towers were built specifically to ward off the tribes of Israel as they passed through the region en route to their promised land.

The past 60 years of archaeological exploration have disproved some of Glueck's claims. We now know, for example, that there were sizable sedentary populations in the region throughout the Bronze Age. Even so, surveys consistently uphold Glueck's view of a dramatic settlement expansion in the highlands during Iron Age I (1200–1000 B.C.E.).

Excavations on the Citadel, however, have produced little more than residual sherd material dating to the early Iron Age. Nor do the literary sources referring to this period mention the site. The biblical account of Jephthah's campaign against the Ammonites, for example, does not mention Rabbath Ammon, even though he would have had to pass it during the pursuit of his adversaries. The Ammonites of the early Iron Age, therefore, seem to have been a loose political entity, probably with a small community established on the Citadel.

Rabbath Ammon re-enters history at about the same time as the formation of the Israelite state, in the early tenth century B.C.E. According to the Bible, Nahash, a



The Art Archive/Archaeological Museum, Amman

This early sixth-century B.C.E. carving of the Assyrian love-war goddess Astarte was also found on the Amman Citadel (compare with photo of small statue of an Ammonite king). The Citadel was inhabited as early as the Neolithic period; it then served as the capital of the Semitic-speaking Ammonite kingdom during the Iron Age (c. 1000–582 B.C.E.)—a period in which the Ammonites were often bitter rivals of the biblical Israelites. Later, in Hellenistic and Roman times, the Citadel was a sacred precinct reserved for temples. With the rise of the early Islamic Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 C.E.), it became the site of a lavish governor's palace (see photo of palace in "Philadelphia of the Decapolis").

king of the Ammonites, dies and is succeeded by his son Hanun. King David (c. 1004–965 B.C.E.) sends a mission to Hanun with words of sympathy, but Hanun treats David's men as spies and punishes them, in typical Ammonite fashion, by cutting off half their beards, cutting off half their garments and dismissing them. David seeks retribution by sending his general Joab to engage the Ammonites. Joab succeeds in severely weakening the enemy, and then David himself takes over. The Israelite king "marched on Rabbah, and attacked and captured it." David then takes the golden crown of the Ammonite kings and places it on his own head (2 Samuel 10–12).

David later secures his hold on Rabbath Ammon with a marriage alliance between his son Solomon and Na'amah, an Ammonite princess. Under the influence of Na'amah, Solomon builds a sanctuary for the Ammonite god Milcom (1 Kings 11:7). Na'amah later gives birth to Rehoboam (c. 928–911 B.C.E.), Solomon's successor and the first king of the southern Israelite kingdom of Judah (I Kings 14:21, 31; 2 Chronicles 12:13).



Archaeological excavations on the Citadel may provide evidence for part of this story. Joab, David's general, apparently was able to weaken the Ammonites by capturing the "King's Pool": "I have attacked Rabbah and have taken the pool," Joab writes in a dispatch to David in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 12:27). This very likely means that Joab captured Rabbath Ammon's water supply, allowing the Israelites to overrun the town.

Salvage excavations in 1969 along the northern edge of the upper terrace uncovered structures dating to the tenth or ninth century B.C.E. Although the material had been severely disturbed by modern building, the excavators were able to delineate the outline of a city wall and possibly a gateway. Within the area enclosed by the wall, a 6-foot-high tunnel had been cut down through the bedrock to a stairway, which in turn descended into a large underground chamber 20 feet wide, 55 feet long and 23 feet high—parts of which were located outside (though below) the city wall.

This large underground chamber resembles hidden underground water systems at Megiddo and other Iron Age sites in Israel, so it is possible that it is indeed the "King's Pool" captured by Joab, a reservoir that kept Rabbath Ammon's citizens supplied with drinking water. This reservoir extending outside the walls of the northern part of the

city—the one part of the city not protected by steep cliffs—was the weakest part of the town's natural defenses.[b]

Following the death of Solomon, Ammon regained its political independence, and steadfastly maintained its isolation throughout much of the ninth and eighth centuries, choosing only periodically to participate in regional wars against the Neo-Assyrians. For example, an inscription on a 7.2-foot-high stela found in Kurkh, on the Tigris River in modern Turkey, recounts how the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.E.) defeated a coalition of 12 smaller kingdoms. One of these kingdoms was led by "Ba'sa, son of Ruhubi, from Ammon." A later Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.E.), boasted that he received tribute from "Sanipu of Bit-Ammon" (literally "House of Ammon," the Assyrian designation for the Ammonite Kingdom). In all likelihood, it was during this period that the kingdom's political and religious institutions were formalized, and Rabbath Ammon emerged as its ritual and ceremonial center.

Although excavations at Rabbath Ammon so far have identified little from this period, some developments point to the transformation of the town. In addition to the water installation at the northern part of the upper terrace, sections of a fortification wall have been found along the southern edge of the lower terrace. It seems that the entire Citadel was enclosed within an extensive defensive system at this time. There were probably other monumental structures as well. In 1961 the Citadel's excavators discovered a small stone slab (about 7.5 inches by 10 inches) with a dedicatory inscription in Ammonite. Dated paleographically to the mid-ninth century B.C.E., the text on the slab commemorates the construction of a public building, possibly a temple to the god Milcom, whose name appears in the first line of the fragment (see the second sidebar to this article).

Excavators have also found numerous statues from this period depicting noble or royal figures. One statue is inscribed as depicting "Yarah-azar, son of Zakir, son of Shanib." This "Shanib" is possibly the "Sanipu of Bit-Ammon" listed as a tribute-payer in the Tiglath-pileser inscription already mentioned. We thus have the names and relative dates of three Ammonite kings from the latter part of the eighth century B.C.E.—all suggesting that the Ammonite capital was a substantial city, a seat of royalty.[c]

Rabbath Ammon enjoyed great prosperity during the seventh century B.C.E. as a vassal state of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Assyrian influence is vividly apparent in seventh- and sixth-century B.C.E. statuary found at Ammon, including carvings of the Assyrian goddess of love and war, Astarte. Virtually every sounding on the Citadel has produced well-preserved remains from this period. Excavations on the lower terrace, for example, have uncovered a large building reminiscent of Assyrian palatial architecture. Described as an elite residence by the excavators, the complex consisted of a large open courtyard, 33 feet by 50 feet, surrounded by a series of rooms, whose floors were covered by a fine white plaster. The building looked out onto a well-paved street and contained imported pottery, Phoenician ivories, lapis lazuli and other luxury items.

The Amman Citadel: A Century of Excavations

By Timothy P. Harrison

Although ancient Amman was visited by numerous 19th-century explorers, it was not until the British surveyor Claude R. Conder arrived at the site in 1881 that it began to receive systematic examination.

In 1904, the Princeton Archaeological Expedition under the direction of Howard Crosby Butler began an even more comprehensive documentation of the town's standing ruins. The Princeton survey, with its careful mapping of ruins in Amman and elsewhere in Transjordan, was published in 1921.

An Italian expedition, led first by Giacomo Guidi and later by Renato Bartoccini, conducted the first actual excavations in Amman from 1927 to 1938, when World War II intervened. This team focused mainly on the upper terrace, especially the northern temple precinct and the Temple of Hercules. Unfortunately, the results of the Italian excavations have been published only in sketchy preliminary reports, and do not provide much information about what was excavated.

Because of the increase in Amman's population, excavations since the Italian expedition have concentrated primarily on the Citadel. In 1949, G. Lankester Harding, then director of Jordan's Department of Antiquities, carried out a salvage operation in the center of the upper terrace, where the Amman Archaeological Museum was to be built. Periodic soundings were made in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and then in 1975 a major initiative was launched by the British School of Archaeology under the direction of Crystal Bennett. Four seasons were completed through 1978, with excavations confined to the area north and west of the archaeological museum. Bennett's team produced a wealth of material, including substantial remains from the Byzantine and Umayyad periods.

In 1977 and 1978, in conjunction with the British excavations, Alastair Northedge surveyed the impressive architectural remains at the northern end of the upper terrace. He identified two major phases of construction, one from the Roman period and one from the Umayyad period. Northedge also examined the fortifications that enclose the Citadel, recording 24 sectors of wall (two additional sectors form an intermediary wall separating the upper and middle terraces) linked by a series of towers and gateways.

Investigations by a Spanish team in the late 1970s and the 1980s have largely confirmed Northedge's findings. The Spanish team has also undertaken to restore the Umayyad buildings (an effort that still continues), including the palace reception hall, over which they built a dome (see photo of the Amman Citadel in "Philadelphia of the Decapolis").

The most recent excavations on the Citadel were conducted between 1990 and 1993 by the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman, with funds from USAID. The aim of this project was to restore the facade of the Temple of Hercules (see photo of the Temple of Hercules in "Philadelphia of the Decapolis").

From 1988 to 1991, a joint French-Jordanian team excavated at Amman's Lower Citadel. The dig was directed by Fawzi Zayadine of Jordan's Department of Antiquities and Jean-Baptiste Humbert of Jerusalem's École Biblique et Archeologique Français.

The Citadel's upper terrace has also yielded numerous remains of the late Iron Age city. Recently, excavations conducted as part of the Temple of Hercules Project have uncovered a series of architectural features, including the remains of a monumental building constructed of megalithic limestone boulders. Its location within what may have been a sacred precinct in more ancient times—and what certainly was a sacred precinct in Roman times—points to a religious function, perhaps even a temple to Milcom or some other Ammonite deity. The recovery of six votive figurines in the debris associated with the building gives some support to such an interpretation.

The prosperity of this *pax Assyriana* is also evident in the wealth displayed in the necropolis that grew up around the city, in the technical skill of Ammonite sculptors and potters, and in the proliferation of epigraphic material in the area. The collapse of the Assyrian Empire at the end of the seventh century B.C.E. brought this era of peaceful coexistence to an end. The Neo-Babylonian Empire assumed most of the Assyrian territory. In 605 B.C.E. King Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of Babylon, invaded the Levant, sacking the Philistine city of Ashkelon on the Mediterranean coast in 604 B.C.E., and, after almost two decades of further conflict, destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. Just four years later, the Ammonite capital of Rabbath Ammon also fell to the Babylonians.

The Ammonites may have been partially responsible for their own demise. According to the Bible, the Babylonians appointed a man named Gedaliah to act as governor of the region following the destruction of Jerusalem. Shortly thereafter, Gedaliah was assassinated by a disgruntled military officer with ties to the former royal family, and the remaining inhabitants of Judah fled to avoid retribution by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:22–26). Gedaliah's assassination was apparently instigated, however, by an Ammonite king named Baalis (Jeremiah 40:14).

Archaeology has provided an interesting link to this Baalis. A seal impression found in 1984 at the Ammonite site of Tell al-'Umayri reads, "Belonging to Milkom'or, servant of Baalyasha." There are several reasons to identify Baalyasha as the biblical Baalis. For one, the theophoric element "baal" (a theophoric element is the name of a deity, like Milcom or Baal, included in the name of a person) is extremely unusual in Ammonite names. Also, the writing on the impression can be dated by paleography to about the early sixth century B.C.E. Finally, the impression bears an image of a four-winged scarab—a symbol of royal authority in the Levant.

So it appears that the Ammonite king Baalyasha, by instigating the assassination of the regional governor, may have incurred the wrath of Babylon. In any event, the fall of Rabbath Ammon marked the end of the Ammonites' existence as an independent people.

But this was not the end of the Citadel's place in history. The story continues in the exciting article that follows.

Notes

a. The modern revival of the city began a little more than a century ago, when Circassians from east of the Black Sea were relocated to the area by Ottoman authorities. In 1921 King Abdullah made Amman the dynastic seat of the Hashemite family. Since then, the city has grown into a thriving metropolis of more than 2 million people.
b. The German scholar Ulrich Hubner has proposed that this "city of the waters" was located down below the Citadel, near the later Roman forum, where excavators have found pottery dating from the eighth to the sixth century B.C.E. However, maintaining the city's water supply that far from its defenses would have left its inhabitants exposed and vulnerable to attack.
c. In another inscription from Ashurbanipal, "the inhabitants of Bit-Ammon" are said to give the largest tribute of all the nations in Palestine, suggesting the wealth of the Ammonites at this time.

A Voice of Their Own: Ammonite Inscriptions

By P. Kyle McCarter, Jr.

Over the past several decades, numerous inscriptions in the Ammonite language have been discovered at archaeological sites in central Jordan. The Iron Age Ammonite kingdom, previously known only from the Bible and from records of its foreign conquerors, was finding its own voice.

The largest number of these inscriptions are personal seals, bearing the names and sometimes the titles of prominent Ammonites who lived from the late eighth to the early sixth century B.C.E. There are also ostraca—documents written with ink on potsherds—dating from the late seventh to the early fifth century. Finally, we have a small number of formal inscriptions, including fragments of carefully engraved stone monuments.

The earliest and most important example of this last category was found in 1961 on the Amman Citadel. Dating to the second half of the ninth century B.C.E., the

Archaeological Museum, Amman





Amman Citadel Inscription (below) is a fragment of a much longer inscription beautifully carved in white fine-grained limestone. Although the text is too incomplete for confident interpretation, it apparently refers to architectural structures—so perhaps it is a building inscription dedicating a temple to the Ammonite god Milcom, who is mentioned in the text.

The only other surviving Ammonite monumental inscription is a small triangle of black basalt, known as the Amman Theater Inscription. Its pitted surface bears two incomplete lines of text, which date to the late sixth century B.C.E.

The Ammonite language is closely related to the languages of the other Jordanian Iron Age states, Moab and Edom, as well as to languages spoken west of the Jordan, Hebrew and Phoenician. We call this language group Canaanite, a branch of the larger West Semitic family of languages. Within the Canaanite group, Ammonite has its closest affiliation with Phoenician and the northern (or Israelite, as opposed to Judahite) dialect of Hebrew.


Archaeological Museum, Amman

Though the language of the Amman Citadel Inscription is Ammonite, the script is Aramaic, comparable in form to other Aramaic inscriptions of the ninth century B.C.E. By the latter part of the eighth century, however, scribes in central Jordan had developed a form of Aramaic script with its own distinctive features, establishing an Ammonite national script. This shows that the script of the Ammonites was a daughter script of Aramaic—in contrast to the scripts of the Ammonites' neighbors to the south, the Moabites and Edomites, which were daughter scripts of Hebrew.

The surviving examples of Ammonite writing suggest that the Ammonite national script remained in use for a couple of centuries. It was then reabsorbed into the standard Aramaic tradition in the early Persian period (the late sixth century B.C.E.), about the same time that the old Hebrew national script was replaced by the square Aramaic script.

An unusual artifact was found in 1972 at Tell Siran, an archaeological site on the campus of the University of Jordan, a few miles northwest of Amman. It is a 4-inch-tall bronze bottle (above) bearing a complete Ammonite inscription of 92 letters. The text extols "the works of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites, son of His.s.al'el, king of the Ammonites, son of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites." The form of the script suggests that the bottle was engraved in the late seventh or early sixth century B.C.E., so that neither this Amminadab nor his grandfather is likely to have been the Amminadab mentioned in a 687 B.C.E inscription of the Assyrian king

Ashurbanipal. The king responsible for our Ammonite inscription should probably be called Amminadab III; his grandfather, Amminadab II; and the king mentioned in the Assyrian inscription, Amminadab I.

An important group of Ammonite ostraca comes from Tell Ḥesban, biblical Heshbon. These economic and administrative documents illustrate the development of the cursive form of the Ammonite script during the sixth century B.C.E. The earliest example dates to about 600 B.C.E., and a second dates to the early sixth century; both show the distinctive features of the Ammonite national script tradition. A third ostracon dates to the middle or third quarter of the sixth century, when the Ammonite script was beginning to merge with the cursive Aramaic script. A final group of three ostraca belong to the end of the sixth century, when the merger with Aramaic cursive was complete. Despite the transformation of the script, the Ammonite language remains recognizable throughout the Ḥesban series.

A second corpus of Ammonite ostraca has been found at Tell el-Mazar in the Jordan Valley, the site of an ancient ford of the Jordan. The main group of ostraca, which exhibit the distinctive features of the Ammonite national script, was found on a floor dated archaeologically to the early sixth century B.C.E. Another ostracon, found in a later archaeological context, probably dates to the fifth century; it contains a list of characteristically Ammonite names written in the Aramaic cursive script of the period.

We now have hundreds of Ammonite seals, the great majority of which were not found in controlled archaeological excavations. Two important examples, the seals of Adoni-nur and Adoni-palṭ, bear the title "servant of Amminadab." The script on these seals dates to the early seventh century B.C.E., suggesting that Adoni-nur and Adoni-palṭ were high-ranking officers (or "servants," in the language of the day) of the Amminadab I mentioned in the inscription of King Ashurbanipal.

Among the most recent Ammonite seals to surface is a beautiful example in brown agate with three lines reading "Belonging to Baa'lyasha, king of the Ammonites"—evidently the "Baalis king of the Ammonites" who, according to Jeremiah 40:14, sent an assassin who slew Gedaliah, the Babylonian governor of Judah following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. (see Robert Deutsch, "Seal of Ba'alis Surfaces," *BAR* 25:02).

Philadelphia of the Decapolis

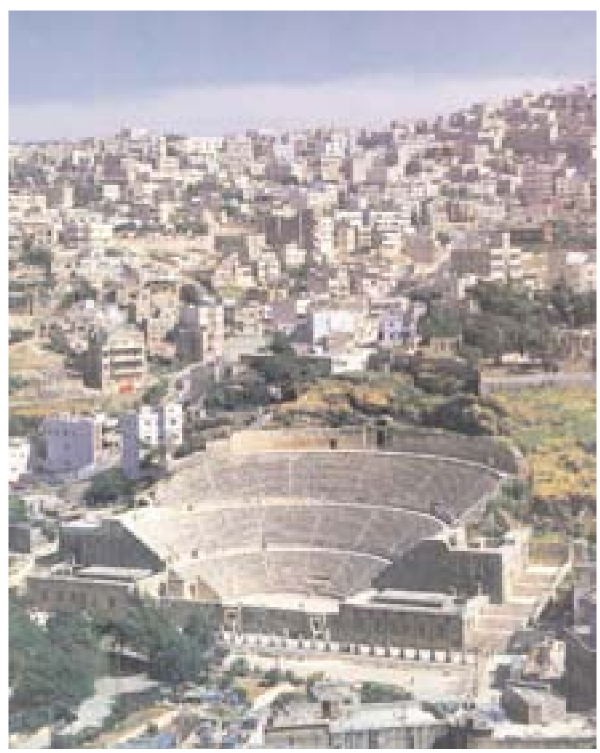
By Alastair Northedge

In the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–246 B.C.), Rabbath Ammon was renamed Philadelphia. Despite the name change, the city's inhabitants remained largely Semitic and probably were never extensively Hellenized.

When Arab Muslims conquered the region of present-day Jordan in 634, they called the city by the name local peoples used: Amman, the modern Arabic version of ancient Ammon. Thus the city became officially Semitic again.

In this, Amman was different from other Levantine cities, such as nearby Jarash or Gadara. The reason is simple. Amman rests among barren rolling hills, cultivable to the west, where the rainfall is higher, but denuded and dry to the east. It is a natural magnet for desert peoples—as Amir (later King) Abdullah realized in 1921 when he decided to locate the Hashemite capital at Amman, where he could rally the tribes of the desert. On the other hand, this site was not particularly attractive to sophisticated Greeks and Romans, who preferred "civilized" places like Antioch or Alexandria.

In the years preceding the creation of the Roman province of Arabia in 106 A.D., Philadelphia was a member of the Decapolis, a league of ten cities stretching between Damascus and Amman. Only a few remains have been uncovered from the Decapolitan



Sonia Halliday

Now preserved amid the sprawl of modern Amman, Jordan, the splendid Roman-period theater shown here was built in the mid-second century A.D., when Amman was called Philadelphia of the Decapolis (a league of 10 cities established in Hellenistic times).

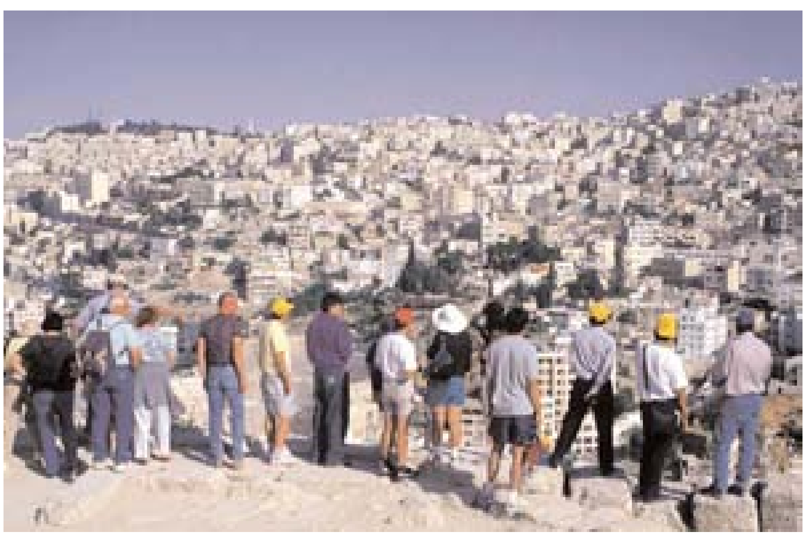
period, which does not appear to have been very prosperous. In the early second century, however, Philadelphia began to thrive as a provincial city of the Roman Empire.

Unlike ancient Rabbath Ammon, the main parts of Roman Philadelphia were not up on the Citadel but down along the Sayl Amman river, which unlike other desert wadis flows throughout the year. A plan of the site was made by the famous British surveyor Claude R. Conder in 1881, just before Circassians fleeing from the Russian advance in the Caucasus resettled in Amman and began to destroy much of what had been preserved from ancient times. Conder's plan shows a medium-sized town with two colonnaded streets, one running east-west on the north bank of the river (a section of this street, called the Decumanus Maximus, has been revealed in salvage excavations) and the other running northwest-southeast in the valley between Jebel Luweibdeh and Jebel al-Qal'a (the Citadel).

On the south side of the river lay the forum, a large colonnaded plaza dating to year 252 of the Pompeian era (or 189 A.D.). Behind the forum, Philadelphia's magnificent theater was built into the steep hillside. Probably dating to the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–180 A.D.), this theater had 33 rows of seats and accommodated 6,000 spectators. Just east of the forum was the odeum (a smaller enclosed theater), which was 120 feet in diameter. Both the theater and the odeum have now been restored.

Southwest of the forum was Philadelphia's nymphaeum, a spectacular fountain fed by the Sayl Amman river. It was a half-decagon (half of a ten-sided polygon) about 225 feet long, with three semi-domed apses flanked by two tiers of niches, probably for statuary. The Philadelphia nymphaeum was one of the largest of its kind in the eastern Roman provinces—comparable to, but larger than, the splendid nymphaeum of Jerash, which was built in 191 A.D.

Julian Worker



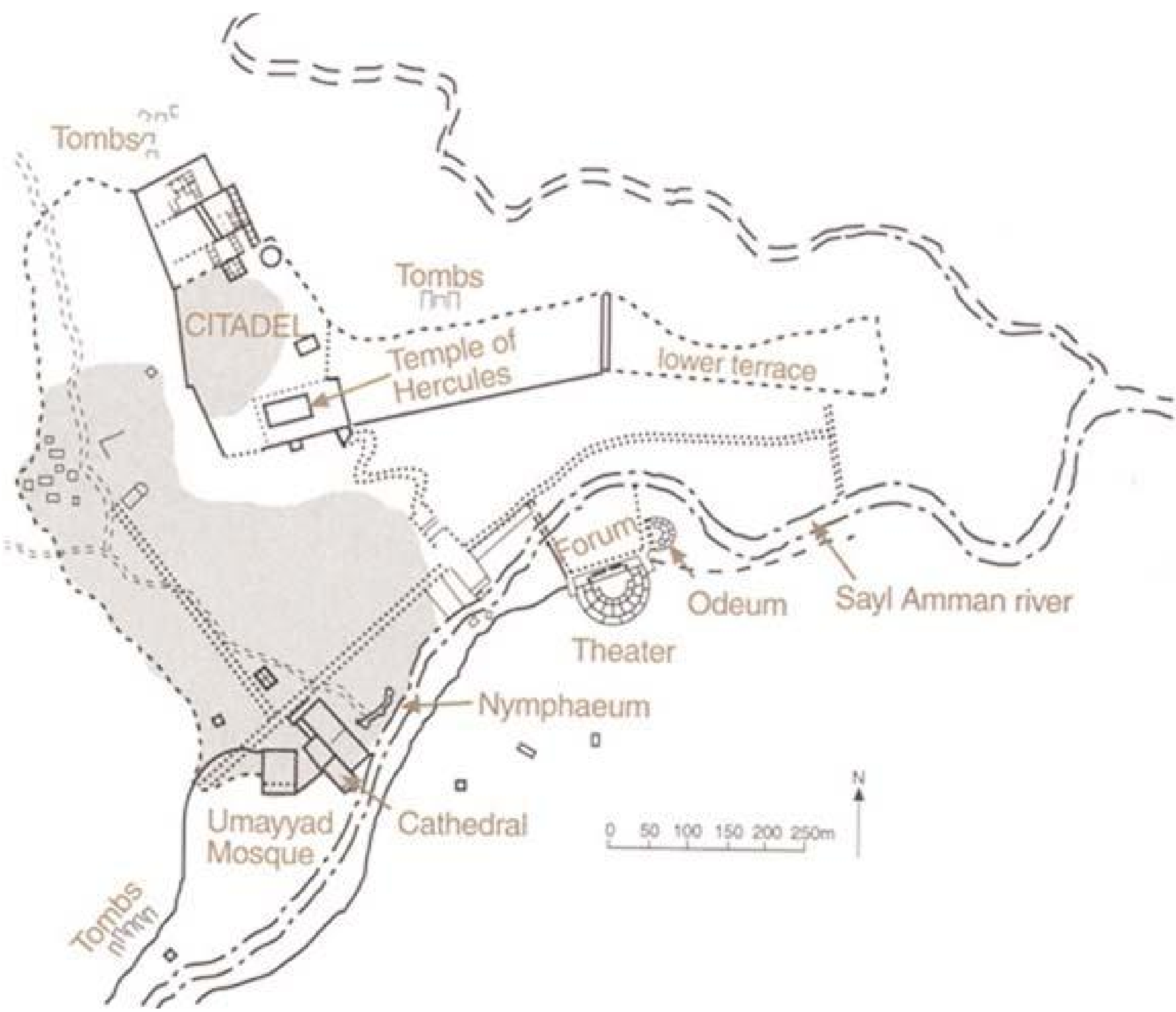
The Roman-period Philadelphia of the Decapolis lay down along the Sayl Amman river (see plan and photo of Roman-period theater) rather than high up on the Citadel, where the people in this photo are standing.

On the north side of the Decumanus Maximus, at the foot of the Citadel, was a propylaeon (an entranceway leading to a temple or sacred precinct). Today little remains of this structure, which once probably consisted of an elaborate gateway leading to a stairway rising to the upper terrace of the Citadel. The reason we have no remains is that Amman, lying near a fault line that runs through the Dead Sea and along the Jordan Valley, is hit by major earthquakes about once a century, the last having occurred in 1927. During earthquakes, buildings at the edge of the Citadel

tend to collapse and fall down the steep incline. That, no doubt, was the fate of the propylaeon.

Excavations in the 1970s showed that Byzantine buildings on the Citadel's upper terrace were constructed right on the bedrock. Since the Byzantine period was not a time of monumental construction, it seems likely that the Citadel was razed during the Roman period, probably in the second century A.D. when so much construction took place. Sadly, this means that we have lost forever much of Rabbath Ammon, the glorious capital of the ancient Ammonites.

The Roman-period Philadelphians enclosed the Citadel's upper terrace with a new fortification wall. The wall was remodeled in the Umayyad period (661–750 A.D.), however, so we do not know much about the details of the earlier towers and gates. The long



stretches of completely new Umayyad wall suggest that sections of the Roman wall had collapsed in an earthquake and slid down the hill.

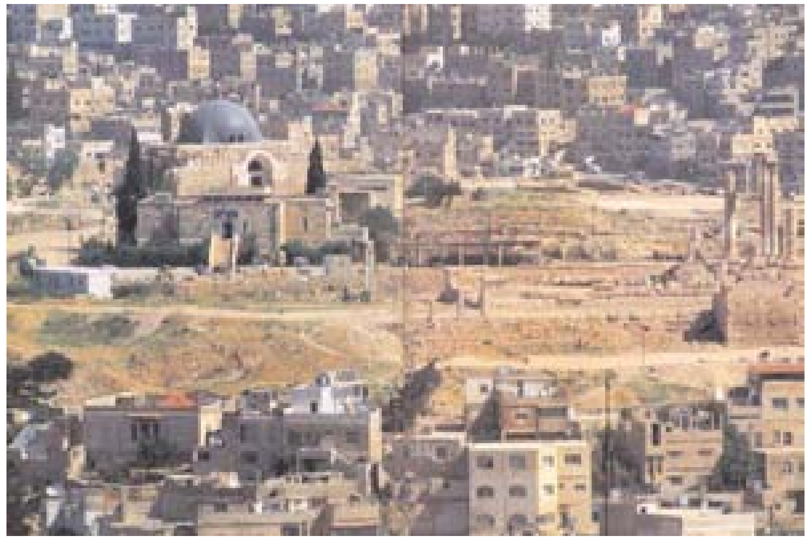
Inside this wall were two sacred enclosures (temenoi, in Greek), one at the north and one at the south. Philadelphia's urban planners apparently conceived of a monumental acropolis on the upper terrace of the Citadel resembling the Acropolis in Athens—two large temples standing alone on a fortified hill. From inscriptions, we even know the names of two of the sponsors of the work: Martas and Doseos.

The southern enclosure is usually thought to have contained the Temple of Hercules mentioned in an inscription found on Jebel Luweibdeh, the hill just west of Jebel al-'Qal'a (the Citadel). The stairway from the propylaeon at the foot of the Citadel, in the principal part of the Roman-period town, led up the hill to a semicircular gate at the southeastern part of this sacred precinct. Clearly identified on the south and east sides, the southern enclosure was a rectangle 390 feet long and 250 feet wide. All that remains of the temple proper is a portion of its huge podium, 140 feet long and 90 feet wide, along with masonry pieces found in secondary contexts in Muslim-period buildings and parts of the temple's facade, including pieces of the wall and some columns. Although earlier scholars, such as Princeton archaeologist Howard Crosby Butler (1872–1922), showed the facade as tetrastyle (four-columned) in their reconstruction drawings, the size of the podium indicates that it was actually hexastyle (six-columned). The American Center of Oriental Research in Amman has remounted the surviving columns, which are about 33 feet tall.

The northern enclosure was even more impressive, but the Umayyads later built a palace directly over the site, destroying many details. The large complex, about 400 feet square, was a double courtyard built on an artificial platform that projects from the north end of the terrace. The ashlar masonry of the platform walls survives to a maximum height of 46 feet. In its day, this enclosure must have looked like a smaller version of the platform of Herod's temple in Jerusalem. Portions of the walls of the southern courtyard (of the northern enclosure) are preserved: Its north wall contained niches and podiums (decorative blocks supporting columns), and its east wall was lined with rooms. Traces of a monumental entrance were found by the Spanish Archaeological Mission underneath the later Umayyad reception hall at the southernmost side of the enclosure. Although archaeologists once thought this enclosure was a forum, we know that such massive platforms were only built for temples. Indeed, there were probably two temples, one in each courtyard, but the structures themselves have disappeared. This complex was probably built earlier than the Temple of Hercules, though both are from Philadelphia's construction-mad second century A.D.

By the end of the second century, Philadelphia had been completely rebuilt in a classical monumental style and had caught up with rival cities, such as Jerash, which had begun building at an earlier date. It is not known what source of wealth made this construction possible, for the local region has never been rich in agricultural land. Probably it was trade, and Philadelphia was at least in part a "caravan city" like Petra and Palmyra.

The Citadel was apparently badly damaged by an earthquake in 363 A.D. This occurred about 50 years after the emperor Constantine (306–337 A.D.) embraced Christianity and shortly before the emperor Theodosius (379–383 A.D.) closed the pagan temples. After the earthquake, then, little was done to restore the Citadel to its classical form. Instead, it soon became the site of Philadelphia's Byzantine quarter. A Byzantine church on the upper terrace was first excavated in 1938 by an Italian team; and a church on the lower terrace was excavated in 1987 by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities in association with the American Center of Oriental Research. The former was a basilica oriented northeast, with mosaic floors forming an abstract design of overlapping circles. Jordanian archaeologist Fawzi Zayadine dated the basilica to the fifth century, but it clearly remained in use into the eighth century, when it was probably covered over by the Umayyad reconstruction of the Citadel.



Julian Worker

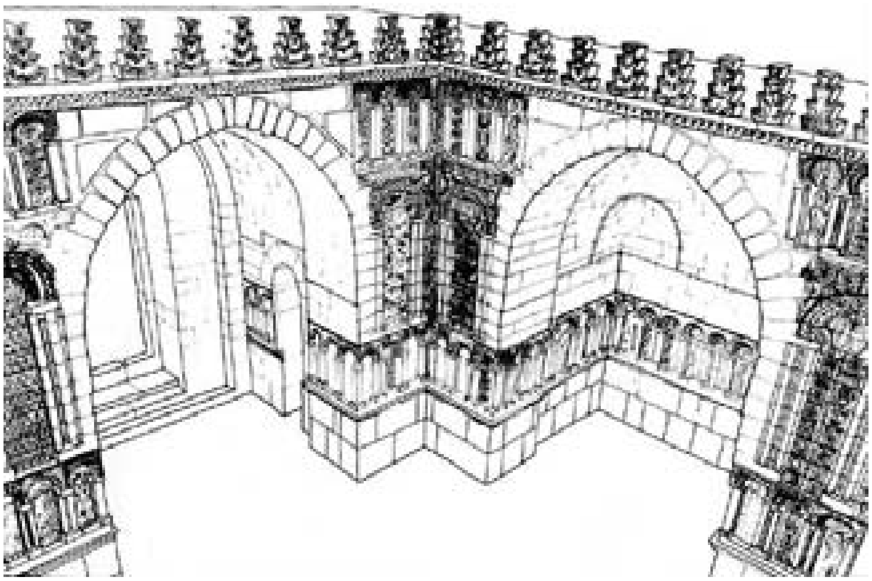
The upper terrace of the Amman Citadel is seen here from the southwest, across a deep wadi. At far left is the bluish-gray dome of the reception hall of the seventh/eighth century A.D. Umayyad palace, which was reconstructed by a Spanish team in the mid-1990s.

The principal church of Philadelphia, located in the lower city near the nymphaeum, was a basilica about 140 by 75 feet. In a photograph taken in 1867, the apse is shown preserved up to three courses of the semi-dome, which was flanked by pairs of arched niches in two tiers. All traces of the church seem to have disappeared during the rebuilding of Amman at the end of the 19th century. Historians call this



Bill Lyons

At far right in the previous photo are Roman-period columns—also shown here—preserved from the facade of the great Temple of Hercules, built in the second century A.D.


From Alastair Northedge, *Studies on Roman and Islamic Amman*

This reconstruction drawing shows half of the cruciform structure of the Umayyad palace reception hall.

church the city's cathedral, because it was almost certainly the seat of the Bishops of Philadelphia, who are attested from the time of the 325 A.D. Council of Nicaea. (The Eastern Church still has a Bishop of Philadelphia and Petra.) A Byzantine inscription found in a small chapel built outside a rock-cut tomb on Jebel Luweibdeh, on the grounds of the modern Greek Catholic church, mentions a bishop named Polyeuctus.

Jordan was the first area targeted by Muslim raids after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632. With the establishment of the Umayyad caliphate in 661 A.D., centered at Damascus, the edge of the Jordanian desert apparently became attractive to royal families. The magnificent Umayyad desert castles of the first half of the eighth century, such as Qusayr Amra and Qasr Mshatta, bear witness to Islamic princely luxury. This was the only time in history that Jordan played a significant role in a world empire; the power of the Umayyad caliphate reached from Samarkand in Uzbekistan and southern Pakistan to Spanish Cordoba.

Amman served as an Umayyad provincial capital. One of its Muslim governors, probably a prince of the Umayyad family, rebuilt the Citadel in the 730s. The Citadel of the Umayyad period was an early version of the medieval castle, with accommodation for the prince and his military entourage. The Byzantine quarter of the upper terrace was leveled by simply knocking the upper parts of buildings down into the lower parts. Houses were built for the garrison, and a palace was constructed on the site of the northern Roman-period temenos, following the outer walls of the earlier enclosure.

The Umayyad palace was built in the Persian style popular at the time. The reception hall, which dominates the entrance to the enclosure, survives to a


Bill Lyons

During the rule of the Islamic Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 A.D.), the area south of the Umayyad palace reception hall (to its right in the photo of the upper terrace of the Amman Citadel) contained residences; in one, excavators found the incense burner shown here.

height of more than 33 feet. The structure's exterior is square with barrel-vaulted doorways; the interior is cruciform in shape with two barrel vaults and two semi-domes. The hall's inner walls are decorated with three tiers of niches carved with Eastern motifs of palmettes, rosettes and trefoils, imitating the sixth-century A.D. Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon, in modern Iraq. In the mid 1990s the Spanish Archaeological Mission, responsible for restoring the reception hall, covered the building with a dome, as would have been done in Spain. Contemporaneous parallels in Iraq and Iran, however, suggest that the center was left open. All in all, the reception hall was a bizarre building, poorly adapted to the cold of the Jordanian winter; indeed, a wooden roof had to be added later as protection from the elements, as we know from holes in the walls of the central court—where supports for the roof were once adjoined to the building.



Photo courtesy of the Palestine Exploration Fund

Philadelphia's Odeum (shown here) and Nymphaeum (see photo of Nymphaeum), as seen in photos taken in 1867. The Odeum was an enclosed theater adjacent to the large open theater shown at the beginning of this article. When 20th-century archaeologists arrived in Amman, nothing remained of these structures (or of numerous other structures known only from old photographs, many taken by the British Palestine Exploration Fund during an 1867 survey); their remains had been dismantled and used as building material by settlers from the east who began arriving in Amman in the 1880s. The Odeum has since been reconstructed from old photographs like this one.

Inside the enclosure, a short columned street led from the reception hall to a second reception hall at the northernmost part of the complex. This structure had a high open-fronted vaulted hall leading to a domed chamber. On both sides of the street and northern reception hall were buildings used as residential apartments. So far, 13 buildings have been identified.

Recent excavations on the upper terrace south of the Umayyad palace have uncovered a public square with shops. Facing the reception hall from across the square was a sizable mosque, which unfortunately is not very well preserved. On the eastern side of the square a bath has been excavated next to a large circular open-air cistern.

It is an impressive structure—the third largest Umayyad palace known, after those at Mshatta and Kuta in Iraq. But there is very little mention of the complex in the chronicles of the period—we only know, from the chronicle of the Arab scholar Tabari (839–923 A.D.), that Sulayman, the son of the caliph Hisham, was imprisoned here in 744.

Soon afterward, in 748 or 749, an earthquake devastated Jerusalem and the Jordan valley. The initial shock was extremely violent and unexpected; at several sites, archaeologists have recovered numerous skeletons of people and animals killed in the

collapse. The quake extensively damaged the fortification walls on the Citadel, along with much else. Two houses on the Citadel that were destroyed by the earthquake have been excavated: one in 1949 by G. Lankester Harding, then Jordan's Director of Antiquities; and the other in 1976 and 1977 by a British team led by Crystal Bennett. These are the earliest well-preserved houses belonging to Muslims. The inhabitants, we learn, used open steatite (soapstone) cooking pots and incense burners imported from Yemen.



Photo courtesy of the Palestine Exploration Fund

Philadelphia's Odeum (see photo of Odeum) and Nymphaeum (shown here), as seen in photos taken in 1867. The Nymphaeum was probably a fountain-filled park sheltered by a half-decagon-shaped shell. When 20th-century archaeologists arrived in Amman, nothing remained of these structures (or of numerous other structures known only from old photographs, many taken by the British Palestine Exploration Fund during an 1867 survey); their remains had been dismantled and used as building material by settlers from the east who began arriving in Amman in the 1880s.

Just two years later, the revolution of 750 A.D. replaced the Umayyads with the Abbasid caliphs, who ruled from Baghdad. The new regime had little interest in Jordan, and investment was diverted to Iraq. Amman remained the seat of governors, however, who now arrived from the east, and it was one of the few places repaired after the earthquake.

But this repair did not last long: In the ninth century an earthquake demolished the Citadel's fortifications and at least one of the palace buildings. This time the Citadel was not repaired; houses were simply built over the remains.

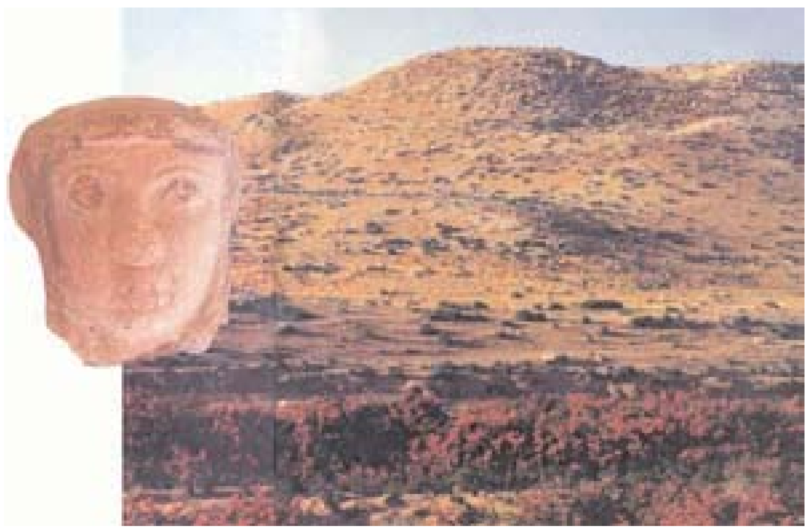
When the Crusaders arrived in 1099, Amman sat on the dividing line between the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Atabeks in Damascus. The city apparently fell into Crusader hands at one point, for two Latin charters of 1161 and 1166 speak of the giving of "Haman" and "Ahamant" as fiefs. Some time after the reconquest of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187, a watchtower was built on the Citadel, but new political arrangements in the Near East had made Amman irrelevant. By the late 14th century the city seems to have been abandoned except as a stop on the hajj road to Mecca. Not until half a millennium later did Amman become relevant once again.

Moab Comes to Life

By P. M. Michèle Daviau and Paul-Eugène Dion

We unexpectedly found a Moabite temple, the first of its kind ever discovered, during an excavation in 1999.

The Moabites, a people living east of the Dead Sea, were neighbors of the ancient Israelites. Ruth is the most touching Moabite figure known to us from the Bible. She stood by her widowed Judahite mother-in-law, Naomi: "Anywhere you go, I will go … your people will be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16).



P.M. Michèle Daviau; inset, Robert Chadwick

The mound of Khirbat al-Mudayna overlooks the Wadi ath-Thamad in central Jordan—an area that was part of Biblical Moab. Here, excavators have uncovered the remains of a walled Iron Age city that is shedding new light on Israel's mysterious eastern neighbors.The most exciting find lies just inside the two-story gate uncovered to the south, where excavators have found a temple—the first Moabite sanctuary ever discovered—complete with altars and several cult objects, including striking female figurines like that shown in the inset.

Although King David counted Ruth among his ancestors, most readers of the Bible are likely to have a rather negative view of the Moabites. The Bible often depicts them in very negative terms. Their god Kemosh is "filth" (*shiqqutz*) (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:13).[1] They owe their name to the incestuous offspring of Lot (Abraham's nephew) and his elder daughter (Genesis 19:36–37). Lot's two daughters, thinking they were the only people left on earth after the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah, each plied their father with wine and seduced him. The sons born to these two unions were named Moab and Ben-ammi (the eponymous ancestor of the Ammonites; Genesis 19:37).

According to the Bible, Eglon, an early Moabite king who encroached on Israelite territory, was so disgustingly fat that the dagger of the Israelite judge Ehud sank, handle and all, into his belly (Judges 3:21–22).

Mesha, a later Moabite king, offered his firstborn son as an *'olah*, a burnt sacrifice, on the rampart of his stronghold in order to save his people when they were besieged by an Israelite army.

It comes as no surprise then that the Apocalypse of Isaiah pictures the Moabites at the end of days in a manure pit, gasping for breath under YHWH's trampling feet (Isaiah 25:10–11).

Apart from these characterizations, one painstakingly combs the Hebrew Bible to find a few hints about the Moabites' occupations. We only learn that the Moabites of Sibma (near Heshbon[2]) maintained excellent vineyards and enjoyed the wine that they produced (Isaiah 16:8–10; Jeremiah 48:32–33),[3] and that Mesha was a sheep-breeder (*noqed*[4]) on a grand scale. According to 2 Kings 3:4, he paid Israel a tribute of 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams.[5] Mesha was from Dibon, precisely in the region where the sons of Gad (an early Israelite tribe) built their sheep pens (Numbers 32:34–36).

The Bible also tells us that Israelite and Moabite men and women intermarried. King Solomon himself had a Moabite wife (1 Kings 11:1).

Fortunately there are other texts besides the Bible that can shed further light on the Moabites. The Moabites burst upon the archaeological scene with the 1868 discovery of the Mesha Stele (or Moabite Stone).[6] An Anglican missionary named F. A. Klein was traveling in Transjordan, where he heard of an inscribed stone lying in the ruins at Dhiban (Biblical Dibon). What he saw there was a black basalt stone, more than 3 feet tall, that was inscribed on one side. Although Klein could not read the 34-line inscription, he realized that the text was valuable. When he announced the discovery to the Prussian consul in Jerusalem, it was agreed that Klein should purchase the stone. Soon, however, both the French and British mounted campaigns to acquire it. Finally, Turkish authorities in Palestine decided to take the stone by force. Because the Bedouin of Dhiban hated the Turkish administration, they set a fire under the stone and poured cold water on it, breaking it into fragments. Fortunately, the French consul in Jerusalem, Charles Clermont-Ganneau, had previously sent a local Arab to make a squeeze, an impression formed by pressing wet paper into the characters of an inscription. After he had set the wet paper on the stone, a quarrel broke out and he had to flee for his life. But, before doing so, he ripped off the paper, which tore into several pieces. Despite the poor condition of the squeeze, it remains the best evidence of the complete text of the stone. The French purchased the larger fragments of the stone, and the British acquired several smaller ones. The English, in an act of unusual generosity in a time of great competition for antiquities, presented their fragments to the French, who reconstructed the stone and put it on display in the Louvre, where it may be seen to this day.[a]

The inscription on the Mesha stele describes a conquest by Omri (c. 883–872 B.C.E.), king of Israel, during the reign of Mesha's father. Omri had conquered certain areas of northern Moab in the region around Madaba. Mesha (c. 853–830 B.C.E.) revolted against the king of Israel and regained control of this area. It included a patchwork of "Lands"—for example, the "Land of Madaba" and the "Land of Atarot" where the "Men of Gad" lived. These lands, located east of the northern end of the Dead Sea, opposite Jericho, had been basically autonomous before the Israelite conquest.

The central part of Moab, which was not conquered by Omri, lies east of the Dead Sea and north of the Wadi Hasa, known in the Bible as the River Zered. In neither Biblical texts nor texts from Egypt and Assyria are the borders of Moab clearly identified. For example, the Wadi Mujib (Jordan's Grand Canyon), the Biblical Arnon, which cuts through central Moab and runs into the Dead Sea, was at one time considered to be Moab's northern border (Deuteronomy 2:9, 18) even though Dibon, Moab's capital city, lies north of the Arnon!

Each area or land in northern Moab had its own more or less distinctive dialect of Hebrew, as we see when we compare the differing Hebrew dialects of the Moabite Stone and the inscription on the altar from Khirbat al-Mudayna (which we discuss below). Another example of the linguistic diversity in ancient Transjordan is the unusual Aramaic of the Deir Alla plaster inscription from the Jordan Valley.[b]

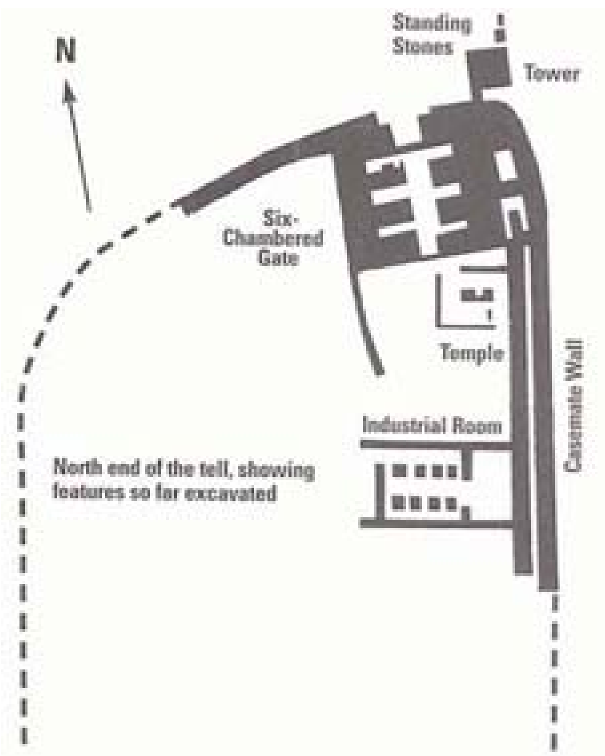
Despite the overall dominance of the god Kemosh and related divine personalities like Ashtar-Kemosh (mentioned in the Mesha Stele, line 17), the Moabite Lands were somewhat fragmented in their religious allegiance as well. YHWH, the Israelite God, was worshiped at Nebo (Mesha Stele, line 18), as was Kemosh at Dibon. DWD or DWDH ("beloved," a title of YHWH) had a kind of altar at Atarot (Mesha Stele, line 12). It is evident from the Mesha Stele that these various deities, and other ones that we know from seals and proper names, each had holy places of their own. However, no Moabite temple has ever been recovered by archaeology—until now, that is, with our discovery of the ruins of a well-furnished sanctuary at a site called Khirbat al-Mudayna.



Map showing location of Khirbat al-Mudayna.

Our contribution to a better understanding of the Moabites comes from excavating five seasons (1996–1999, 2001) at this site. One of us (Daviau) first saw Khirbat al-Mudayna, whose ancient

name remains unknown, with Professor Robert Boling of McCormick Theological Seminary and his wife Jean, three days before their tragic death in 1994 in an automobile accident. On that day in December, we looked down on the site from the heights of the north bank of the Wadi ath-Thamad. Khirbat al-Mudayna lies on the south bank of the riverbed, surrounded by the lush green fields of central Jordan, and is one of six sites in Jordan with the same name. Although it was known to 19th century travelers and to Nelson Glueck,[c] Khirbat al-Mudayna had never been excavated.



Plan of the north end of Khirbat al-Mudayna, showing features so far excavated.

The site consists of a walled settlement that is oval-shaped and measures about 460 feet by 260 feet. The fortification wall surrounding the town is a casemate wall (two parallel walls with cross walls forming rooms) similar to Israelite casemate walls of the eighth to seventh centuries B.C.E. The fortification system is 16 feet thick and can be traced at ground level around the crest and upper slope of the mound. A trench down the south face of the mound revealed a crushed plaster glacis (slope) that connected the outer wall at the top with a dry moat, cut into the bedrock, at the bottom.

The north end of the tell rises 100 feet above the surrounding fields and looks down on the wadi. On this promontory, the people of Khirbat al-Mudayna built their city gate. In style, it matches the six-chambered gates at Megiddo, Hazor, Lachish and Gezer in ancient Israel. Due to the narrow shape of the natural hill, the gate is somewhat smaller than its Israelite models, but consists of the same features—a central road that passes between two units, each containing three rooms on a side. The gate's total length is approximately 50 feet and its width is 49 feet, making it almost a square. The north end of each unit includes a bastion more than 11 feet thick that protected the outer rooms and was connected to the casemate wall. To the north of the eastern bastion, there are the remains of a small tower, 13 feet square, that probably guarded the approach road that winds around the tell. A bench runs along the north face of the tower and a niche, perpendicular to the bench, supports two standing stones. These stones are aniconic (without inscription or decoration), similar to one from Bethsaida.[d]

We completely excavated all the rooms in the gate, and revealed its construction details. The walls separating one room from another are 6.5 feet high and more than 5 feet thick, and are set on bedrock. Crevices in the bedrock were filled with cobbles and packed soil to provide firm support. The street between the chambers on either side is

partially built on bedrock. At the northern and southern ends of this street, L-shaped raised stone thresholds blocked wheeled vehicles—only pedestrians could enter the town. A pair of wooden doors stood open at the north entrance during the day. We found two stones embedded in the surface of the street, one on each side, which served as doorstops for the double doors. Each stone has a central hole that held a wooden post. The doors opened inward, away from the lip of the threshold; a wooden post would have been inserted into the holes of the blocking stones to hold the doors open. These doors to the city burned in the final conflagration that destroyed the gate. Fragments of wood, however, were recovered from the street, providing evidence of the doors' existence.

Immediately south of where the doors would have opened is a bench that runs along each side of the central street. Alongside the eastern bench and extending the full length of the street is a stone-lined drain that carried water from the courtyard at the inner end of the gate to the entrance. At this point, the drain runs under the threshold stones.

A fourth wall closed off each gate chamber from the central road. Only a narrow doorway led from each chamber into the street. The fourth wall appears to be missing from one room, but we found grim evidence that one had



Elaine Kirby

A stone's throw from al-Mudayna's gate stood a 13-foot-square tower (part of its wall is visible in the upper right of the photograph) that guarded the approach road to the city. In front of the tower was a bench and, perpendicular to it, a niche with a pair of standing stones. The stones are aniconic—without any kind of inscription—and are similar to those found outside the gates at other Iron Age towns like Bethsaida. These high places may have been used by visitors to the town, making offerings according to their local religious traditions—perhaps in thanks for safely arriving at their destination.



Robert Chadwick

A six-chambered, two-story gate guarded the main entrance to the settlement. But even with 15-foot thick casemate walls (parallel walls segmented into rooms by perpendicular walls), the fortifications couldn't keep the town from meeting a violent end sometime late in the seventh century B.C.E.: Burnt timbers—and even the remains of a burnt limestone wall—show that the gate was destroyed in a terrible fire.

Elaine Kirby



Industrial zone. The Bible gives little insight into how the Moabites made a living, although it does mention that Moab's King Mesha was a major sheep breeder, having paid a substantial amount of lambs and wool to Israel in tribute (2 Kings 3:4). Like the land around Mesha's capital at Dibon, the hillsides surrounding Khirbat al-Mudayna may well have been dotted with sheep, if the evidence of industrial activity already unearthed at the settlement is anything to go by. The remains of loom weights, an ivory spindle and a bone weaving tool attest that the building shown, south of the temple, was used for the production of textiles. (Weaving items were also found in the side rooms of the city gate, having fallen from upper story rooms when that structure burned.) Two rows of stone pillars, with limestone basins in between, partitioned this building into three sections or aisles.

once stood there: The fire that destroyed the town was so intense that the stones of this wall burned into a mound of lime that now marks the place where it had stood. In the room on the opposite side of the central road, there are the remains of a plaited floor mat that had actually fitted like a wall-to-wall carpet.

Three large limestone basins, each fallen into a gate room from an upper story, provide evidence of industrial activity in the gate area. One basin was associated with a group of unfired clay loom weights, while another was inscribed with graffiti depicting looms, a donkey and a palm tree. These finds suggest that cloth was manufactured in the upper story rooms of the gate. A second building where textiles may have been manufactured was discovered in 2001, south of the gate. The central space in this building is divided into three parallel rooms by two rows of stone pillars. Between the pillars are low cobblestone walls that support limestone basins. We found a total of nine basins, a handful of loom weights, an ivory spindle and a weaving tool made of bone. We do not yet know whether this industrial building was destroyed at the same time as the gate; we will continue to excavate it this summer.

Collapsed roof beams from the rooms in the gate provide evidence of how it was constructed, as well as of the serious fire that brought it to an end as a defensive feature. A large amount of wood and charred ceiling beams that can be used for carbon 14 dating were recovered in the collapse of the upper story. We also found dozens of iron arrowheads, five bronze arrowheads (Scythian, trilobate style weapons), a single bronze armor scale and 35 small stones that may have been used as sling stones. The enemy who destroyed Khirbat al-Mudayna remains a mystery, but the weapons and the pottery recovered from the gate rooms suggest a date toward the end of the seventh century B.C.E.

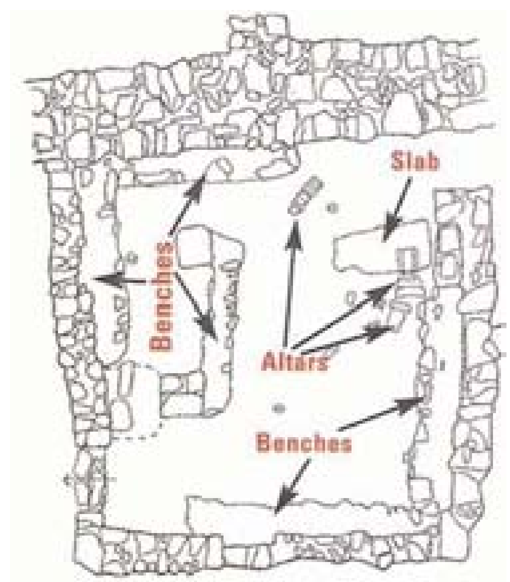
Elaine Kirby



A decorated limestone incense altar was also found in the middle room of this building. It had fallen, along with a lot of pottery—storage jars, bowls, jugs and a pithos—from a room on the second story. It isn't known yet whether this happened at the same time as the destruction of the gate, but excavations this summer may help answer that question.

The most outstanding discovery at Khirbat al-Mudayna occurred in 1999. A small temple was uncovered in the area south of the east end of the gate. This is the first Moabite temple uncovered in Jordan. Two steps lead down into the main temple room, which is divided in two parts by two square pillars that held up the ceiling; a bench was located between these two pillars. Other benches lined the main walls of the temple—a common feature of religious architecture in the ancient world, from Greece to Mesopotamia.

The finds from this building remove all doubt that it was a temple. The focal point in the main room is a large, highly polished stone slab, set into the floor, perpendicular to the south wall. Three limestone altars, two of which were painted, were found broken on top of this slab. One of the altars can be identified as a libation altar. It stands about 2.5 feet high (not including its base, which was badly shattered). The altar's shaft is almost square, 12 inches on a side. A molding runs vertically along each corner of the shaft, creating a sunken, central panel on each of the four sides. The upper third of the altar constitutes the offering table. Looking at the table from the side, we can see that the rim curves down slightly between the corners. This is a new style of altar and differs from altars found elsewhere that have horns on each corner. On the side of the offering table, pale red horizontal lines frame a row of triangles, painted alternately red and black. Other painted symbols are located near the lower section of the rim and on the vertical molding.



Plan of the Moabite temple.

The upper surface of this altar is surrounded by a 2-inch-wide rim or border. Half of the upper surface is flat, but the other half consists of two separate features. On one side is a depression or sump, 4 inches deep and 4 inches in diameter. The area adjacent is pitted and slopes gently to a hole that pierces the rim of the sump on the diagonal, so

that liquid would drain into the depression. It is these features that identify this altar as a libation altar.

The second altar, also with a square shaft, is smaller than the libation altar. Unfortunately, it was badly damaged when the temple collapsed. Nevertheless, the offering table still has soot on its upper surface, evidence that burned offerings were placed on it.



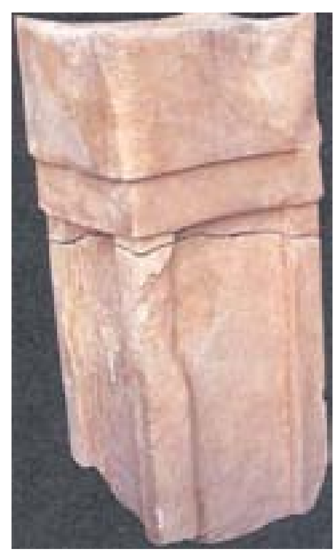
Robert Chadwick

Two steps lead down into an 18-foot by 18-foot square temple just south of the gate complex. The room was divided into two parts by a pair of pillars with a bench running between them (upper left in the photo), and benches along each of the walls. The focal point of the room was a polished stone slab set into the floor near the southeast corner (upper right in the photo).

The third and most elaborate of the altars found in the temple is completely different in shape. It is tall (more than 3 feet) and has a conical base. It was cut from a single piece of limestone and has a cup-shaped depression at the top. At two places on the cylindrical shaft are rings of stone-carved hanging petals, which were originally painted alternately red and black. On the front were black and red triangles. Below the triangles a curving black line, ending in two prongs, looks like a serpent. The bowl-like depression at the top is stained with soot. Although found in three pieces, this altar is complete.

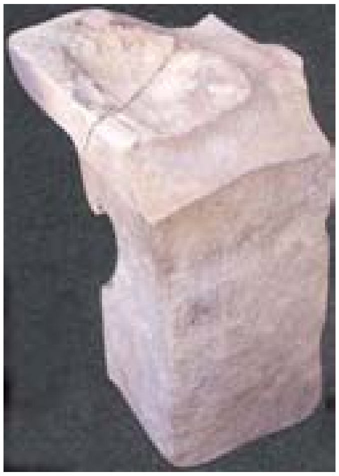
On the back side of the altar, the facets of the vertical shaft are decorated with a palm tree and an inscription in a Moabite-related script and dialect. The words run perpendicular to the rim of the altar. The altar was probably lying on its side when the stone carver cut the inscription. The text is a label informing us that this is "the incense altar that Elishama made for YSP, the daughter of 'WT."[7]

The finds from the temple also include clay oil lamps, broken female figurines and jewelry, mostly beads. The small number of finds suggest that everything that could be carried was removed from the temple when the town was attacked, sometime in the seventh to sixth century B.C.E. Outside in the courtyard were more than 4,000 animal bones and two dozen ceramic figurines of animals. The bones show cut marks suggesting that the animals had been slaughtered; they may have been used either as offerings in the temple or as part of a religious meal.



Robert Chadwick

Three limestone altars were found lying on or near the slab that was the focal point of the room uncovered in Mudayna. One is rectangular, with a shallow depression in the top draining into a sump and red and black painted markings on the side; it would have been used for libations.



P.M. Michèle Daviau

One of three limestone altars found lying on or near the slab that was the focal point of the room uncovered in Mudayna, this smaller altar was found shattered but has a similar shape to the larger rectangular altar; soot residue on its upper surface attests to its having been used for burnt offerings. (In the courtyard outside the temple, 4,000 animal bones were found with cut marks on them; they may have been used as offerings or as part of a ritual meal.)

No doubt this temple served the people who lived at Khirbat al-Mudayna. It is especially significant, because very few Iron Age temples have been found inside ancient towns. One is the temple to Yahweh at Arad;[e] it too was located within the site. These sites are invaluable because they illustrate the religious traditions of the ancient people who lived there, in contrast to shrines with standing stones located outside a town. These stood either in front of the gate, where visitors to the town could make offerings according to their own traditions (as at Tel Dan and Bethsaida),[f] or at wayside shrines (as at ‘En Hatzeva and at Horvat Qitmit[g]). At ‘En Hatzeva, the excavators found a pit filled with cultic vessels and ceramic statues located outside the settlement, and thus the relationship between the inhabitants of the site and the cultic objects can only be inferred. So too, at Qitmit: We know little of the people who made use of this wayside shrine, which sits in an isolated site with no town in the neighborhood.



Robert Chadwick

As it happens, we too have discovered a wayside shrine. As part of our ongoing regional survey, we are exploring the wadi system for 6 miles in every direction, finding and recording the features at many new sites. This survey has located ancient towns, watchtowers, cemeteries (ancient and modern), reservoirs, caves and cisterns, and concentrations of pottery and flint tools dating to the Neolithic period (8300–4500 B.C.E.). The terrain in the drainage basin of the Wadi ath-Thamad is very rugged; no wonder earlier investigators seldom traveled through this area. Even though we only visited sites that were close to modern roads during our first season (1996), we located a small site on an isolated hill where we found a complete female figurine and fragments of two anthropomorphic vessels. We named this site Wadi ath-Thamad No. 13, or WT #13 for short. Obviously, we had to return to this site in subsequent seasons.

A rectangular perimeter wall encloses WT #13, and in some places stone benches line the wall. This shrine site has unfortunately been looted and badly disturbed in modern times, leaving only a small area of

This third altar from Mudayna—tall and cylindrical, with a conical base—also has soot residue on top; its different purpose, however, is confirmed by an inscription written along one side: “the incense altar that Elishama made for YSP, the daughter of ’WT.”

Nelly Lama



Mysterious disks. The figurines uncovered at the wayside shrine show female figures holding circular objects either perpendicular to their body, or as shown in these examples, flat against their chests. Excavators do not know what the disk represents, or even whether these figures are meant to be deities or human worshipers. Similar figures are known from a few Iron Age sites in Israel, where the disks have been interpreted as being tambourines, sacrificial cakes or loaves and (more speculatively) solar emblems. The Bible refers to tambourines being played by women and girls at victory celebrations, so it may be that the figures represent cult participants. But female divinities like Ishtar are also represented with tambourines in some Mesopotamian cylinder seals, so the possibility that these are goddesses, objects of worship, can't be ruled out. These objects, and the other recent finds at Khirbat al-Mudayna, testify to a richer Moabite culture than previously suspected.

Nelly Lama



One of the figurines uncovered at the wayside shrine—a female figure holding a circular object flat against her chest.

undisturbed cobblestones and hard-packed soil that appear to be in situ. However, under the cobblestones we found several broken figurines, a model throne/chair and sherds, possibly from ceramic statues. Sifting of the loose soil piled up by the looters produced many small finds, including jewelry (mostly carnelian and shell beads), a scarab, sea shells, fossils, fragments of coral, two faience amulets (one of the god Horus as a child and one of Ptah as a child), miniature ceramic vessels, limestone bowls, three limestone figurines and thousands of sherds, primarily from cooking pots, jars and jugs. The small ceramic female figurines each hold a disc flat against their chest, or hold a drum in their hands, perpendicular to the body. A second group of objects consists of large clay statues; one of these has a lamp on its head. Other artifacts characteristic of cultic activities are a two-story model shrine with windows and perforated ceramic cups with tripod feet.

More excavation at the shrine site is planned for future seasons. However, we already know that our finds have their closest affinities with the supposedly Edomite finds from Horvat Qitmit and 'En Hatzeva. At the same time, the faience amulet of Horus as a child, together with the hairstyle of two of the figurines, suggest a strong Egyptian or Phoenician influence, which is surprising in this location at this time. Was this shrine site used by travelers who each came with their own religious traditions and left offerings at the shrine? Or are we looking at a site that represents the traditions of the "Men of Gad" who lived in the Madaba area? Or is it a hybrid site, reflecting both Moabite and foreign practices? And how did this site relate to nearby settlements like Khirbat al-Mudayna, which seems to have such a different assemblage of religious artifacts?

Certainly, the culture represented at Khirbat al-Mudayna can be called Moabite in a broad sense, although both the script and the dialect represented on the conical altar are somewhat different from the language and script of the Mesha Inscription. This tells us that there is greater local variety than we had imagined prior to our excavation. Yet the pottery at the site resembles that at the Moabite site of Dibon, suggesting a common potting tradition, if not a common culture in all other respects.



P.M. Michèle Daviau

A wayside shrine. More evidence of Moabite religious practices has been found 2.5 miles from Khirbat al-Mudayna. Here, an isolated one-room structure, surrounded by a rectangular perimeter wall, apparently served as a desert cult place. The site was looted in modern times, but in the debris the looters left behind, as well as under an area of undisturbed cobblestones, excavators uncovered an assortment of items, including several broken figurines and a striking limestone figurine head, jewelry fragments, bowls, a model throne or chair, sherds that may have come from ceramic statues and a two-story model shrine.

So who were the people who lived at Khirbat al-Mudayna, and what was their relationship to the city of Dibon and the king of Moab? Clearly, they were not Israelites: Their town was heavily defended against enemies attacking from the north and west (Israel), even though they shared with Israel certain architectural traditions, such as the six-chambered gate. Although the Mesha Stele mentions the fortification of towns along Moab's northern border following the war with Israel, the construction of the gate at Khirbat al-Mudayna seems to date to the period after the death of Mesha (Carbon 14 analysis yields a date of 810–790 B.C.E.).

Like all archaeologists, we have ended up with even more questions than we started out with. But there is little doubt that we have opened up a new chapter in the history of Moab and Moabite culture.

Funding from Wilfrid Laurier University was in the form of a Short-Term Research Grant, and a Research Equipment Grant. Additional support came from the Centre for Research Development of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, from Austin Presbyterian Seminary, as well as from individual participants and generous gifts from P.-E. Dion and R. Levesque.



Robert Middelstaedt

The religious artifacts found near Khirbat al-Mudayna are similar to cult objects identified as Edomite discovered at Horvat Qitmit and 'En Hatzeva. Perhaps they reflect the religious tradition of the "Men of Gad" whom the Bible locates near Madaba. Or the shrine may have been used by travelers, leaving offerings representing a variety of different traditions. Pictured here is one of the artifacts uncovered in the desert shrine—a striking limestone figurine head.

Notes

a. See Sigfried Horn, ‘Why the Moabite Stone Was Blown to Pieces,’ **BAR** 22:03.
b. See André Lemaire, “Fragments from the Book of Balaam Found at Deir Alla: Text Foretells Cosmic Disaster,” **BAR** 11:05.
c. See Floyd S. Fierman, “Rabbi Nelson Glueck: An Archaeologist’s Secret Life in the Service of the OSS,” **BAR** 12:05.
d. Rami Arav, Richard A. Freund and John F. Shroder, Jr., “Bethsaida Rediscovered,” **BAR** 26:01.
e. See Ze’ev Herzog, Miriam Aharoni and Anson F. Rainey, “Arad—An Ancient Israelite Fortress with a Temple to Yahweh,” **BAR** 13:02.
f. See Avraham Biran, “Sacred Spaces: Of Standing Stones, High Places and Cult Objects at Tel Dan,” **BAR** 21:05; reprinted as Chapter Seven in *Celebrating Avraham* (Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992), p. 92.
g. For ‘En Hatzeva, see Rudolf Cohen and Yigal Yisrael, “Smashing the Idols: Piecing Together an Edomite Shrine in Judah,” **BAR** 22:04. For Horvat Qitmit, see Itzhaq Beit-Arieh, “New Light on the Edomites,’ **BAR** 14:02.
h. See Ze’ev Meshel, “Did Yahweh Have a Consort?” **BAR** 05:02; A. Lemaire, “Who or What Was Yahweh’s Asherah?” **BAR** 10:06; and “Yahweh and His Asherah: The Debate Continues,” sidebar to “Sacred Stones in the Desert,” **BAR** 27:03.

1. There is actually little doubt that Kemosh was the chief god of the Moabites; he is the prime mover behind all the main accomplishments of which King Mesha boasted in his famous inscription, the “Moabite Stone.” For a convenient edition and commentaries, see A. Dearman, ed., *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (Archaeology and Biblical Studies 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); his name also appears, as the divine element, in the names of many ancient Moabites. See N. Avigad and B. Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem, 1997), p. 508.
2. Jerome, commentary on Isaiah 16:8.
3. The inhabitants of the Madaba plains cultivated superb vineyards long after the disappearance of Moab. The vine is central in the iconography of the numerous mosaics from Byzantine times, published in M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman: American Center of Oriental Research, 1993).
4. On this term see M. Coogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings* (Anchor Bible 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 43.
5. On Moab’s tribute of lambs, see also Isaiah 16:1. In modern times, the 19th-century traveler Henry Baker Tristram left eyewitness comments that lend some plausibility to those figures (*The Land of Moab*. *Travels and Discoveries on the East Side of the Dead Sea and the Jordan* [London: John Murray, 2nd ed. 1874], pp. 223–24).
6. See M. P. Graham, “The Discovery and Reconstruction of the Mesha Inscription,” pp. 41–92 in A. Dearman, ed., *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (Archaeology and Biblical Studies 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).
7. P.-E. Dion and P.M.M. Daviau, “An Inscribed Incense Altar of Iron Age II at Hòirbet el-Mudeµyine (Jordan),” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 116 (2000), pp. 1–13.



Zev Radovan

The Mesha Stele.

Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Kemosh (But Were Afraid to Ask)

By Eric Wargo

About the religion of the Moabites, frustratingly little is known. Even given the recent discovery of the temple at Khirbat al-Mudayna, described in the accompanying article, most archaeological evidence so far only sheds indirect light on what the Moabites believed and how they worshiped. The Hebrew Bible tells us that the Israelites' neighbors east of the Dead Sea worshiped the "loathsome," "abominable," "filthy" (depending on the translation) god *Kemosh* (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:13). The identity of the Moabites' principal deity is confirmed by the famous Mesha Stele. Unearthed in 1868 in Dhiban, this slab of black basalt bears a royal inscription commemorating a series of victories against the Israelites by Moab's King Mesha, who repeatedly attributes those victories to Kemosh.

Although our sources are patchy, it is nevertheless possible to sketch some of the broad outlines of Moabite religion, and to offer educated guesses about Moab's god. Despite the aspersions heaped upon Kemosh in the Hebrew Bible, the Moabites' rituals and beliefs seem not to have differed much from that of the Israelites; and Kemosh appears to have had a good deal in common with Yahweh.

The worship of Kemosh dates to well before the Moabite period. He is mentioned (as Kamish) on a list of deities unearthed in third-millennium B.C.E. Ebla, in the north of Syria. Kamish may have been one of that city's principal gods: There was a temple to Kamish there, at which offerings were given; Kamish was also incorporated into personal names, was used as the name of a month and as a component in place names like Carchemish (kar-kamisû).

Some scholars have suggested that an Iron Age stone relief unearthed in Jordan near modern Kerak (the Biblical Kir-haraseth) and known as the Shihan Stele might give us a glimpse of Kemosh. It depicts a warrior with a javelin, wearing an

Egyptian-style kilt. It could represent a warrior-hero or a king or a warlike god such as Kemosh. A similar figure, however, has been found at Qadbun in Syria—an area where the culture was different and Kemosh was unknown. Thus the identity of the figure in the Shihan Stele must remain in doubt. The same is true of the divinities depicted on another stone also found near Kerak, the Balu‘a Stele, dated to the 12th–11th centuries B.C.E. This stone shows three figures—probably a king standing before a god attired like the figure in the Shihan stele, and flanked on the other side by a goddess.



Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York, NY

The Balu‘a Stele.

Did Kemosh have a consort? Although the Bible describes the Moabites as the "people of Kemosh" (Numbers 21; Jeremiah 48) most scholars think that the Moabites were not monotheistic. Moabites at least acknowledged the existence of other gods (henotheism), and it may be that during some periods they were polytheistic like the Canaanites. A passage in the Mesha inscription has been thought to imply that Kemosh had a female counterpart; the passage refers to Mesha's divinely-mandated destruction of Nebo:

> And Kemosh said to me: 'Go! Take Nebo against Israel.' And I went by night and fought against it from break of dawn till noon. And I took it and slew all: 7,000 men, boys, women, girls, and pregnant women, because I had devoted it to Ashtar-Kemosh. And I took thence the altar-hearths of YHWH, and I dragged them before Kemosh.

This, we should note, is the oldest known reference to the Israelite god Yahweh (YHWH) in any text. But who is Ashtar-Kemosh? Compound names could be used to denote divine couples. (A controversial inscription from the Sinai even links Yahweh with a consort, "Asherah."[h]) If Ashtar is Kemosh's divine consort, then she could be related either to the Mesopotamian goddess of war and fertility, Ishtar, or to the West Semitic fertility goddess Astarte. The Moabites may have represented this female deity with the numerous clay figurines that have been found at cult sites like the one described in the accompanying article, a couple miles from Khirbat al-Mudayna. Other scholars think it is more likely, however, that Ashtar may refer to the god Athtar or Attar (best known at the time among Arabs and Aramaeans), in which case the compound name could simply signify that these two deities—Ashtar and Kemosh—were seen as one and the same.

King Solomon of Israel respected the deities of foreign peoples and even erected a high place to Kemosh, but the Moabites and Israelites often saw their respective

gods as rivals. Yet there were many strong parallels between the religions of Moab and Israel: High places were erected to Kemosh, as to Yahweh, and like Yahweh, sacrifices were made to him. As we now know from Khirbat al-Mudayna, sweet-smelling substances were burned in Moabite temples—again, a feature common to Israelite worship. More importantly, the Mesha Stele and Biblical sources both acknowledge that Kemosh was actively involved, like Yahweh, in the affairs of his people—particularly when it came to matters of territory and warfare. The Mesha Stele is clear evidence that the Moabites attributed their military successes to Kemosh in much the same way that the Israelites attributed theirs to Yahweh; again and again, Kemosh sends Mesha on the march in the same style as Yahweh commanded Joshua or Gideon. The inscription also shows that, like Yahweh, Kemosh seems to have ranged from gladness to displeasure in his feelings for his people at various times; the Israelite oppression that Moab had previously endured was due, Mesha explains, to the fact that "Kemosh was angry with his land."



Erich Lessing

The Shihan Stele.

A vivid and unusual window onto Moabite religious belief comes from 2 Kings 3:27, which tells of King Mesha's sacrifice to his god (presumably Kemosh) of his firstborn son, for the purpose of breaking an Israelite siege. The Israelites withdrew, although the account doesn't make their reasons entirely clear: Did they fear a terrible divine intervention by the Moabite god because of this awesome sacrifice in his name?

In the end, only Kemosh knows for sure.

For more about Kemosh and Moabite religion, see Gerald L. Mattingly, "Moabite Religion and the Mesha Inscription," in Andrew Dearman, ed., *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); and P.M. Michèle Daviau, "New Light on Iron Age Religious Iconography: The Evidence from Moab," in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan VII* (Amman: Department of Antiquities of Jordan, 1999], pp. 317–326.

When People Lived at Petra

By Joseph J. Basile

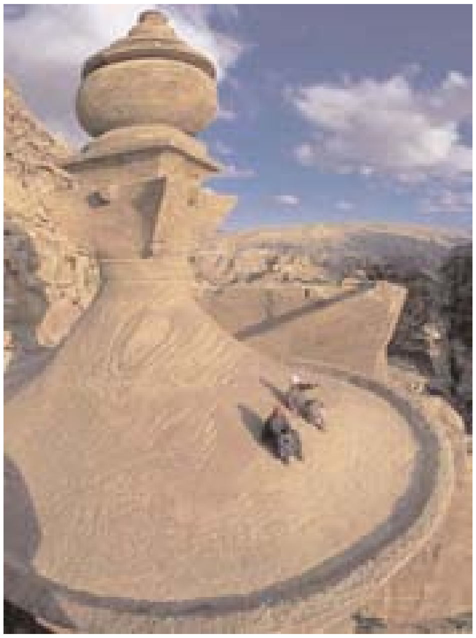
It seems no work of Man's creative hand,
By labor wrought as wavering fancy planned;
    But from the rock as if by magic grown,
    Eternal, silent, beautiful, alone!
Not virgin-white like that old Doric shrine,
Where erst Athena her rites divine;
    Not saintly-grey, like many a minster fane,
    That crowns the hill and consecrates the plain;
But rose-red as if the blush of dawn
That first beheld them were not yet withdrawn;
    The hues of youth upon a brow of woe,
    Which man deemed old two thousand years ago,
Match me such a marvel save in Eastern clime,
A rose-red city half as old as Time.

John William Burgon (1813–1888)

Petra is easily one of the world's most spectacular archaeological sites.[1] Located in what is now the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan, the site's famous tomb facades are carved into the magnificent red, pink and brown sandstone cliffs surrounding the Wadi Mousa, a seasonal riverbed. Visitors to Petra, awestruck by these gigantic tombs, might conclude that this was a city of the dead. At its height, however, Petra was the capital of a powerful kingdom populated by thousands of living souls. Indeed, this "rose-red" city remained a vital, thriving community for centuries.

Petra's story may begin as early as the upper Paleolithic period (c. 40,000–10,000 B.C.). Stone tools have been discovered in the region that probably date to this time, when people lived as hunters and gatherers. More certain evidence comes from the

Richard Nowitz



From their perch atop a rock-hewn mausoleum called el Deir (the monastery), a pair of Bedouin children enjoy a spectacular view of the ancient city of Petra in western Jordan. Founded in the fourth century B.C. by a tribe of seminomadic Arab traders known as the Nabataeans, Petra was once a center of the Near Eastern trade, especially spices, which financed its spectacular tombs, temples, theaters and colonnaded streets. The city was conquered by the Romans in 106 A.D., but remained a vital metropolis until the sixth or seventh century, when—for reasons that are still unknown—Petra was abandoned and sank into obscurity. Rediscovered by the Swiss explorer Johann Burckhardt (see the first sidebar to this article) in the early l9th century, Petra was mistakenly thought to be simply a huge necropolis. In recent years, however, archaeologists have begun to investigate Petra's houses, roads and shops—revealing what daily life was like in this city of spice and stone.

later Neolithic period (c. 6,000–4,500 B.C.)—the era that saw a shift to agriculture and the domestication of animals. Neolithic tools, tombs and settlements have been found in the Petra valley; one of the most important Neolithic villages in the ancient Near East is located just a few miles north of Petra, at Beidha. Excavated in the 1950s and 1960s by the British archaeologist Diana Kirkbride, this extensive pre-pottery Neolithic site contains both round and square structures with rough fieldstone foundations, highly specialized stone tools, and evidence of agriculture (for example, grinding stones used to produce flour).[2]



During the late second millennium and early first millennium B.C., the Hebrew Bible tells us, the Petra region was part of the kingdom of the Edomites. According to long-held tradition, the Israelites passed through Petra on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. A number of Petra's most important geographical features are associated with Moses: The Wadi Mousa, the Riverbed of Moses, for example, is the main valley at Petra; and in Islamic tradition, Moses' brother Aaron is said to be buried on Jebel Haroun, the Mountain of Aaron. During the reign of King David (tenth century B.C.), the Israelites attacked Edom, beginning a cycle of enmity that would last the entire history of the two kingdoms. This animosity continued

for generations, even as the United Monarchy of the Israelites was replaced by the divided kingdoms of Israel in the north and Judah in the south. One of the kings of Judah, Amaziah (796–781 B.C.), was associated with a later campaign against the Edomites, as well as a particularly bloody event that, until recently, was thought to have taken place in Petra. According to 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, Amaziah led a counteroffensive against Edomite raiding parties that had been marauding in his kingdom. He pushed them back into Edom, where they took refuge in a mountain fort called Sela (meaning the Rock; "Petra" is Greek for Rock). Amaziah slew 10,000 men while capturing the fort (2 Kings 14:7); then he threw the survivors of the siege off the mountain to their deaths (2 Chronicles 25:11–12). Early in this century, the massif of Umm el-Biyara, which overlooks the central Petra Valley on the west, was identified as a possible location of biblical Sela. Subsequent excavations on top of the plateau by the British archaeologist Crystal M. Bennett uncovered a small Edomite settlement there, but the earliest datable remains were from the seventh century B.C., a century after Amaziah,[3] thus ruling out Umm el-Biyara as the site of Sela. Nevertheless, Bennett's excavations proved Petra was inhabited in the Iron Age.

The most famous ruins at Petra, built centuries later, are associated with the kingdom of the Nabataeans. The origins of the Nabataeans are shrouded in mystery. They were perhaps originally seminomadic herdsmen and traders who penetrated the disintegrating Edomite kingdom from northwestern Arabia. Some of the earliest securely identified Nabataean sites are indeed from this region, such as ancient Hegra (Medain Saleh, in Saudi Arabia). The Nabataeans soon came to dominate the trade routes that were developing in the region, which made them wealthy and prosperous. And they made their capital at Petra.

Petra commended itself as the Nabataean capital for several reasons. First and foremost, it is strategically located, dominating that part of the Rift Valley system known as the Wadi Araba (between the Gulf of Aqaba and the Dead Sea). This valley had long been an important trade route from the Gulf of Aqaba and northwest

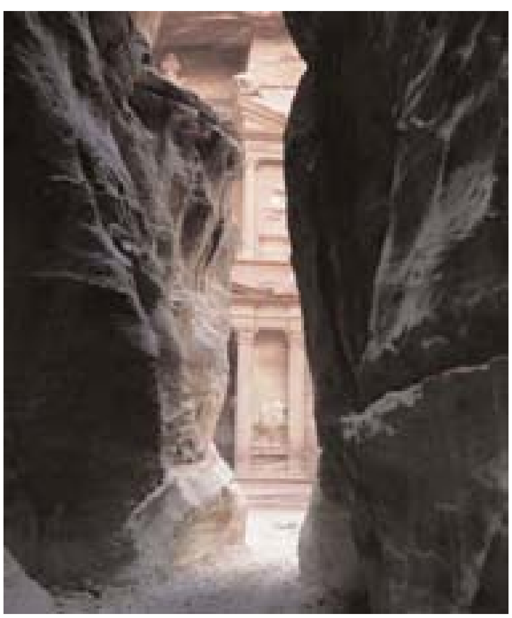


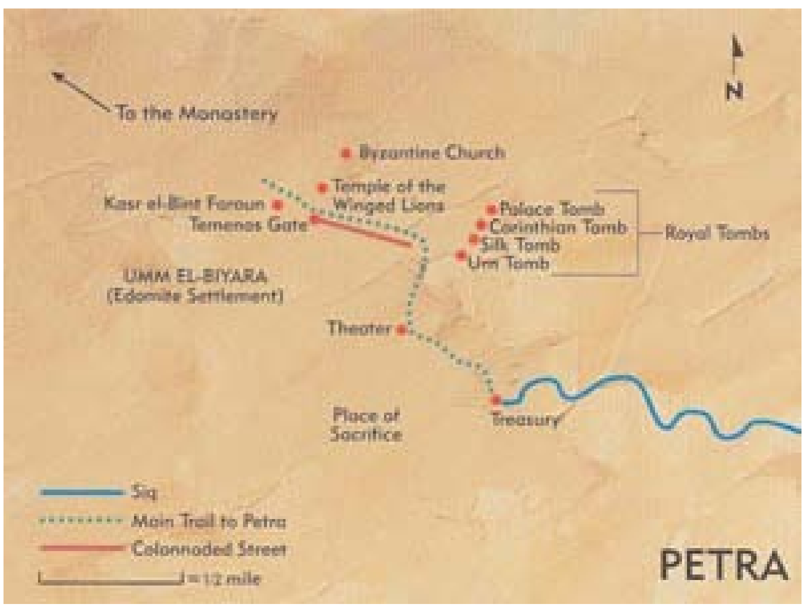
Photo by Jane Taylor/Sonia Halliday Photographs

Most visitors' first sight of Petra is the Khasneh el-Faroun, or Treasury of the Pharaoh (glimpsed here through a narrow maw at the end of the Siq). Carved into the face of one of Petra's famous "rose-red" cliffs, this Nabataean monument has a 65-foot-tall colonnaded facade, which is lavishly decorated with scenes from Greek and Nabataean mythology. Most archaeologists believe it was built during the reign of the Nabataean king Aretas III Philhellene (86–62 B.C.). The structure's name derives from a local Bedouin belief that Petra once housed the riches of the Egyptian pharaohs; in the 19th century, Bedouins fired rifles at the urn on top of the Treasury (visible at the upper left of the picture), in the hope that it would shatter and release a shower of gold.

Photo by Jane Taylor/Sonia Halliday Photographs



For all its grandeur, Petra's Treasury building often seems dwarfed by the magnificent desert landscape. Surrounded by imposing mountains, the city's ruins can only be reached through a narrow, rocky corridor known as the Siq, which debouches into a larger canyon at the Treasury. The path to Petra then winds northwest to the city's amphitheater (see photo of amphitheater). The road then turns due north, following the Wadi Mousa. Petra's enormous Roman-style amphitheater was probably constructed by the Nabataean king Aretas IV (4 B.C.–27 A.D.). Some of its classical features may be the result of renovations carried out by the Romans after they annexed Petra in 106 A.D. The 19th-century adventurer Johann Burckhardt claimed that the theater could seat around 3,000 people, but modern scholars estimate its actual capacity at somewhere between 7,000 and 12,000.



Arabia through the Jordan Valley to the Hauran (in Syria) and coastal Palestine. Petra was a kind of hub connecting sites such as Gaza, Aqaba (ancient Aila) and the north Arabian towns of Hegra and Jawf with Damascus in Syria. The Nabataeans' domination of these trade routes resulted in their growing wealth and power. In the second and first centuries B.C., they became serious economic rivals of the major Levantine powers in the Hellenistic period: the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms (the southwestern and northeastern portions of Alexander the Great's empire) and the Hasmonean kingdom (a Jewish kingdom, with its capital at Jerusalem, that comprised much of modern Israel).

Petra is not only strategically located, but also easily defended, since it is surrounded by steep sandstone cliffs and deep wadis. Petra is also relatively well-watered. This may come as a surprise to those who have seen the place, which appears at first glance to be nothing but desert. A number of important springs are located in the region, however, including one associated with Moses, the Ain Mousa. Moreover, the valleys catch

runoff during the short rainy season. The Nabataeans took full advantage of this, constructing cisterns and reservoirs to trap rain water for agricultural use. Thus enough food was grown in the region around the city to support thousands of people.

Originally, Petra seems to have been a rendezvous point and emporium for the semi-nomadic Nabataean tribes. This is suggested by the Roman historian Diodorus Siculus (first century B.C.). Diodorus did not write from firsthand knowledge, so we must take what he says about the barbarous Nabataeans with a large grain of salt. He did have access, however, to Seleucid historical accounts. The first historical episode associated with the site, according to Diodorus, involved the Seleucid king Antigonos I Monopthalmos (the One-Eyed), who in 312 B.C. sent his general Athanaeos to attack Petra to smash the growing Nabataean power. When Athanaeos arrived, he found that the menfolk were off trading, leaving Petra (described as a "rock," unwalled but defensible) occupied mostly by old men, women and children. Athanaeos swooped in, seized goods worth over 500 talents (or three million drachmae, worth from 29,000 to 42,000 pounds of silver!)—a testament to the wealth of the Nabataeans, even early on—and promptly retired. When the men of the town returned and learned what had happened, they followed Athanaeos's force and destroyed it.[4] The Nabataeans regained their treasures and returned home. Later, Antigonos sent another general, Demetrios, against Petra; the Nabataeans simply packed up and left—another indication of their semi-nomadic ways—leaving a small defensive force in the "rock," which managed to resist Demetrios until he could be bribed into abandoning the siege. Diodorus's history seems to chronicle the rise of a nomadic trading people, who managed to gain a foothold in the region around Petra and could not be dislodged, not even by the armed might of the successors to Alexander the Great, the Seleucid Greeks.

By the middle of the second century B.C., the Nabataeans had established a traditional kingdom, with centralized authority and a capital at Petra. At its height, the Nabataean sphere of influence extended to Damascus in the north, Jawf in the east, Gaza in the west and Leuke Kome in the south. Their capital city had perhaps 30,000 inhabitants.[5] During this period the Nabataeans carved most of their famous tomb facades at Petra and built many of the city's other important monuments. The Nabataeans soon became so strong that they drew the attention of Rome, which by the second century B.C. was expanding into the Hellenistic Near East, and by 30 B.C. would control both the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms.

As the Romans turned their gaze eastward, the wealth and power of the Nabataeans naturally attracted them. Rome sent two separate armies against the desert nation—one commanded by Pompey in 63 B.C. and another during the reign of Augustus (31 B.C.–14 A.D.)—but these armies were unaccustomed to desert fighting (and were also susceptible to bribery by the Nabataeans). Eventually, however, the Nabataeans recognized that they could no longer resist the ever-growing might of Rome. In 106 A.D. the last Nabataean ruler, Rabbel II, allowed the kingdom to be annexed into the Roman Empire of Trajan. Reorganized into the Provincia Arabia, the regional capital was

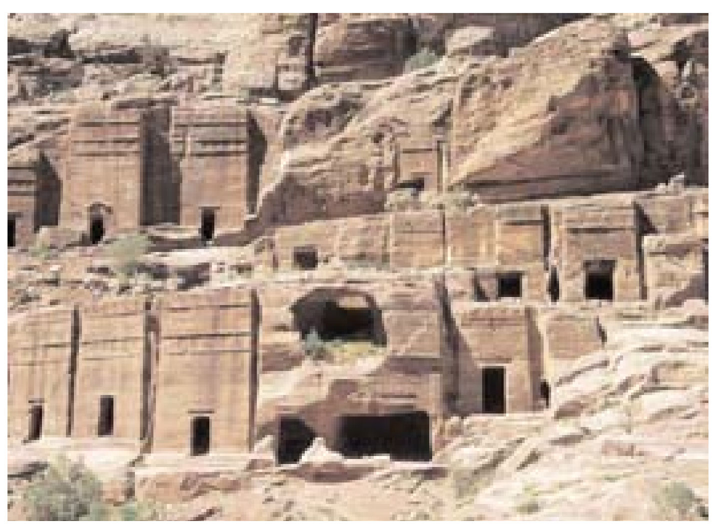
eventually moved to the Nabataean settlement at Bostra, in Syria. However, Petra continued to be an important city and was officially named a "metropolis" (a great city of the province) in the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–180 A.D.). During the period of Roman domination, a number of important monuments were constructed in the city, and some others, like the famous Colonnaded Street, were remodeled.



Photo by Jane Taylor/Sonia Halliday Photographs

With the advent of Christianity and the establishment of the Eastern Roman Empire (with its capital at Constantinople) in the fourth century A.D., Petra continued to flourish as a Byzantine city, and a number of important churches were added to the city's monuments. However, several factors soon conspired to put an end to Petra's prosperity. First, a series of devastating earthquakes wrecked key buildings. The most powerful one occurred in 363 A.D., but major quakes rocked Petra in later centuries, too. Second, a shift in trade routes—away from the south and Petra, in favor of routes up the Tigris and Euphrates valleys, through Dura Europos and Palmyra and on to Damascus—resulted in economic decline. Finally, with the rise of Islam in the seventh century, the region became a political, economic and cultural backwater, depopulated and forgotten as a great center of ancient Nabataean culture.

The end of Byzantine Petra was the end of Petra as a city in antiquity. Buildings were abandoned. In the Islamic world, the region was remembered only as the place of the shrine of Moses' brother Aaron. The Crusaders built a few imposing castles in the area, but these, too, were soon abandoned as the region was left to Bedouin nomads. In the Western world, Petra simply passed out of memory. This was the



David Harris

Long known for its grand mausoleums and mortuary temples, Petra also houses many smaller, less-imposing monuments, including the simple, block-like tombs that line the city's Street of Facades. Dating around the first century A.D., these anonymous, functional, burial chambers look like an ancient apartment building for the dead. A few of the burial chambers have rounded roofs, and many are marked with a simple crow-step pattern.

state of affairs in 1812, when a 28-year-old Swiss explorer named Johann Ludwig Burckhardt set out from Tripoli, in Syria, on a journey to Cairo.

Burckhardt, the son of a Swiss officer in the French army, was educated at the University of Göttingen in Germany and sought to make his scholarly career in England. There he met Sir Joseph Banks, head of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa, who convinced Burckhardt to carry on the work of the association. Since it was still somewhat perilous for Western Christians to travel in the Islamic world, Burckhardt went to Syria posing as a Muslim merchant from India named Ibrahim ibn-Abdullah. From there he was to embark on an overland journey to Cairo and thence to the African interior. In preparation, he studied Arabic, Muslim culture and Koranic law, and he was soon knowledgeable in all three.

On his journey south from Tripoli, Burckhardt entered Transjordan, where he began to hear local Bedouin tales of a magnificent city carved ages ago out of solid rock by magicians working for the Egyptian pharaoh. The city was located in the vicinity of the Tomb of Aaron and a valley called the River of Moses. Burckhardt, under the pretense of making a sacrifice at Aaron's tomb (as a pious Muslim), was led to the city, which he explored as well as he could before his nervous guide (who doubted the trustworthiness of the local Bedouin) asked him to move on. He had seen enough, however, and his studies in ancient history made it possible for him to venture a guess as to the identity of the forgotten city: "It appears very probable that the ruins in Wady Mousa are those of the ancient Petra." Burckhardt then pressed on to Egypt, where he converted to Islam, explored such sites as Abu Simbel and finally died of dysentery in 1817—without ever reaching the African interior. He is buried in the Islamic cemetery of Cairo and his grave marker bears his Arabic name, Ibrahim ibn-Abdullah.

Other travelers followed, and descriptions of Petra, both verbal

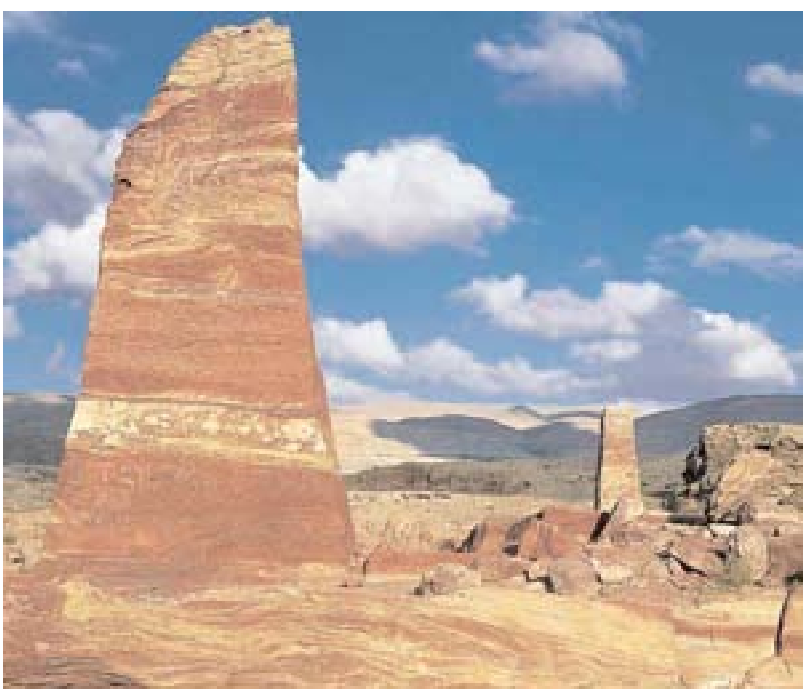


Photo by Jane Taylor/Sonia Halliday Photographs

Gatekeepers of the Gods? These two 18-foot-tall stone pillars stand just below the Nabataeans' High Place of Sacrifice on the summit of Jebel Madhbah. A mountain-top courtyard sacred to the Nabataeans' greatest deities, Dushara and al-Uzza, the high place was probably the most important cultic site in Nabataean religion. No one is certain what rituals or ceremonies took place there, but the presence of several easily recognizable sacrificial altars has given the site its name. Some scholars suggest that the twin obelisks are aniconic images of Dushara and al-Uzza.

and pictorial, soon excited the Western imagination. By the end of the 19th century, the burgeoning science of archaeology would make its mark there.

Petra's first explorers were understandably most interested in the magnificent tomb facades of the Nabataeans—the celebrated Khasneh el-Faroun (Treasury of the Pharaoh) at the end of the canyon-like Siq, the massive Deir (Monastery) in the mountains overlooking the city, and the so-called Royal Tombs (the Urn, Silk, Corinthian and Palace tombs). Indeed, the prevalence of these carved and rock-hewn tombs—hundreds of them clustered in the hills and cliff sides—prompted some to think of Petra as a huge necropolis: a city of the dead, peopled only by corpses and perhaps the priests who attended them.[6]



Photo by Jane Taylor/Sonia Halliday Photographs

Just north of the amphitheater, at the foot of Jebel Khubtha, stand four of Petra's largest rock-carved tombs. Known as the Royal Tombs, they are often described as the burial place of the Nabataean kings, but no one really knows what these grand monuments enshrined. At far right is the first-century A.D. Urn Tomb, a tall, colonnaded building with two rows of vaulted terraces at the base of its facade. The Urn Tomb was converted into a church in the mid-fifth century A.D., and it still bears an inscription to "Christ the Savior" on one of its inner walls. To the north (left) of the Urn Tomb, is the plainer Silk Tomb, named for the multi-hued striations running across its facade. Next in line is the first-century A.D. Corinthian Tomb, known for its floral columns and capitals. Finally, at far left, is the 150-foot-high, 150-foot-wide Palace Tomb. This immense first-century A.D. monument was partially built with free-standing stones; much of its original superstructure has collapsed over time.

In the last few decades, however, most of the archaeological work has been done not in the necropolis area but in the so-called central valley, through which the Wadi Mousa runs after exiting the narrow gorge of the Siq. The evidence here is clear: This central valley region was a city of paved and colonnaded streets, shops, marketplaces, gardens, theaters, temples and, most importantly, houses—this was a city of the living.

The visitor to Petra typically enters the site by proceeding down the canyon-like Siq to the Khasneh tomb facade, then emerges into a wider canyon where the city's main theater was carved into a cliff face. Then, turning west, below the shadow of Jebel Khubtha and the Royal Tombs, the visitor enters the central valley. Here the Wadi Mousa runs east-west into a wide open space, with rocky slopes flanking it on the north and south. On these slopes are clustered the main buildings of the great city, dating to the Nabataean period (second century B.C. to first century A.D.), the Roman period (second and third centuries A.D.) and the Byzantine period (fourth to seventh centuries A.D.).

The main artery of the city was the so-called Colonnaded Street, a 20-foot-wide roadway paved with marble slabs, running east-west above the south bank of the wadi.

Columns lined the street on either side (at least along its eastern half), perhaps to support a roof for covered sidewalks. The street was originally explored by Diana Kirkbride, excavator of the Neolithic town at Beidha, but later excavations by British archaeologist Peter Parr suggest that it was built sometime during the first century A.D. or shortly thereafter. Parr also discovered evidence of an earlier road, from perhaps the first century B.C.[7]

At the eastern end of the road, a number of shops have been excavated by archaeologist Zbigniew Fiema of the American Center of Oriental Research (Amman).[8] Perhaps built as early as the first century A.D., these shops passed through several phases of redesign and reuse right up to the Byzantine period. Indeed, a cross has been cut into a door-post of one of the shops, clear evidence that the buildings continued to be used into the Christian era. Also in this area of the street, between the north sidewalk and the wadi, was the Nymphaeum, a kind of elegant fountain commonly found in Roman-period settlements. Opposite the Nymphaeum, on the south side of the street, a broad monumental staircase led to a plateau traditionally called the Upper Market, although there has been little archaeological exploration here and its true function is unknown. At the foot of the staircase was a triumphal arch, erected in the Roman period. It bore an inscription from the reign of Marcus Aurelius identifying Petra as a metropolis.

At the other end of the Colonnaded Street, another monumental staircase leads from the south sidewalk up to the courtyard of a structure traditionally called the Great Temple—actually a complex of structures, including a majestic paved temenos (a sacred courtyard) of over 2,500 square feet flanked by colonnades decorated with elephant-headed capitals. On an upper temenos terrace stands the main building, which has been excavated since the early 1990s by archaeologist Martha Sharp Joukowsky and her team from Brown University.[9] The main building is a massive affair, containing a spacious portico decorated with sculpted limestone busts and marble theater masks. Four huge columns support magnificently carved floral capitals.

Early in the 20th century, the German scholars Walter Bachmann, Carl Watzinger and Theodor Wiegand identified this complex as a temple. However, the Brown University team has discovered that at some point—perhaps in the first or second century A.D.—the earlier parts of the building (dating to as early as the first century B.C.) were modified, and a theater-like seating complex was added to the central part of the structure. Preliminary analysis of architectural features discovered during the 1999 season suggests that the stage of the theater is a still later addition and that for some time the theater existed without a stage. Perhaps the Great Temple was modified into a sacred theater, like the one at Birketein (near Jerash, north of Amman), and then later into a conventional theater.[10] There is ample evidence for reuse of the site in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods as well: Rebuilt walls and features constructed with reused architectural elements from the temple can be found in both the lower and upper temenoi; and at some point late in the history of the lower temenos, the east colonnade area was used as a lime kiln installation. There is also evidence that a late bath complex was built into the west colonnade and that the orchestra of the central

theater was used to store ashlar blocks for later construction. More excavation will be needed, however, before we can understand the various functions of this highly enigmatic structure throughout its history.

To the east of the Great Temple complex is the so-called Lower Market area, interpreted by earlier explorers like Bachmann, Watzinger and Wiegand as a marketplace or forum. Indeed, the whole terraced complex south of the Colonnaded Street was regarded by early archaeologists as a number of markets, or *souks*. However, recent excavations in this area by Leigh-Ann Bedal of the University of Pennsylvania have uncovered a magnificent ornamental pool, perhaps with a garden to the north.[11] This kind of garden and pool arrangement, sometimes called a *paradaisos*, was often part of a palace complex or civic center in Hellenistic and Roman cities. This discovery calls into question the traditional market interpretation and suggests how much more we have to learn about Petra's central city.

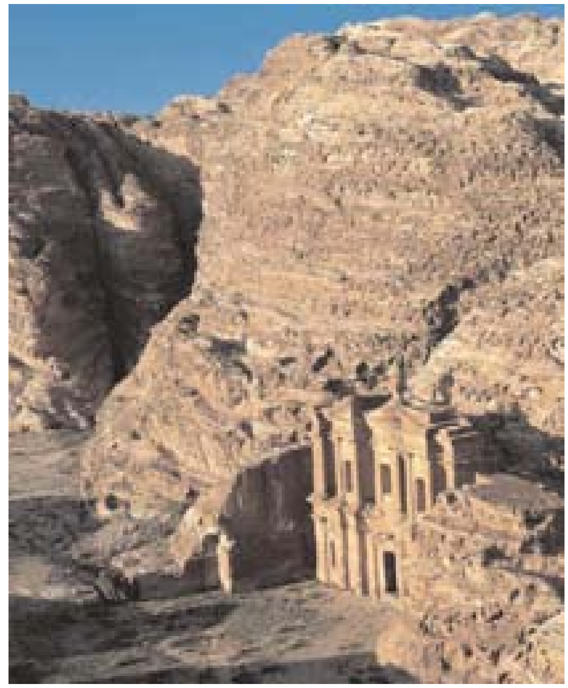


Photo by Jane Taylor/Sonia Halliday Photographs

Sprouting near the top of a mountain peak, el Deir (the Monastery) dates to the late first century A.D. The building's overall design is similar to that of the Treasury, but it is much larger and less ornate. The building was thought to have been a monastery because of the Christian crosses that were painted and inscribed on its inner walls during the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. When it was first constructed, however, el Deir served as a banquet hall and meeting place for the cult of the deified Nabataean king Obodas I (c. 96–86 B.C.). A nearby inscription, uncovered by archaeologists in 1991, refers to the building as the site of "the symposium of Obodas the God."

At the end of the Colonnaded Street, adjacent to the bath complex, is the famous Temenos Gate, a triple archway modeled, seemingly, after Roman triumphal arches.[12] A magnificent demonstration of how the Nabataeans combined Greco-Roman ideas with local design elements, the gate was decorated with sculpted busts and perhaps bore inscriptions. Free-standing columns stood before the east facade; engaged columns elaborated the west. The date of this structure is still under debate. It is sometimes dated to the Severan period (193–211 A.D.) because this is the period of the earliest known triple arch with detached columns. However, the archaeological evidence suggests that the Temenos Gate was contemporaneous with the construction of the Colonnaded Street—so perhaps the Petra arch was based on earlier now-lost triple arches, like the Arch of Trajan in Rome which is postulated (by some) to have had three gateways.[13] Trajan (98–117 A.D.) annexed the Nabataean kingdom to Rome and may have been honored by Petra's new Roman citizens with an arch emulating the one he had already built in the imperial capital.



Photo by Jane Taylor/Sonia Halliday Photographs

First excavated in 1974 by Philip Hammond of the University of Utah, the Temple of the Winged Lions exemplifies the Nabataeans' box-in-a-box construction, in which an altar is surrounded by a screen wall. Ringed by workshops, annexes and courtyards, the temple gets its name from the winged-lion figurines that grace its limestone capitals. The deity worshiped here remains in question, but cultic objects recovered from the site suggest the Nabataean goddess al-Uzza.

The Temenos Gate functioned, however, not as a triumphal arch but as a gateway to the sacred precinct of the greatest of Petra's temples, the Kasr el-Bint Faroun (Palace of the Pharaoh's Daughter).[14] A paved courtyard nearly 500 feet long culminates in a massive structure of cut sandstone—probably constructed in the first century B.C., either after or as part of the building program of the great Nabataean king Obodas III (30–9 B.C.). The temple itself, which measures almost 5,000 square feet, is built on a foundation of solid bedrock and is thus relatively well preserved, despite Petra's many devastating earthquakes. Four massive facade columns were flanked by antae (protruding wings of the exterior side walls), forming a deep porch. The cella (holy-of-holies), in back is divided into three rooms, and staircases lead to a mezzanine level above. A frieze of Greek-style triglyphs and metopes of the Doric order is overhung by a heavy cornice more in keeping with the Ionic-Corinthian order. Here, again, we see the Nabataeans freely combining Greco-Roman, Near Eastern, Egyptian and native ideas in the construction of their magnificent temple, which dominated the center of the city.



Photo by Jane Taylor/Sonia Halliday Photographs

A stunning blend of Greco-Roman and Nabataean traditions, the Temenos Gate stands at the western end of the city's Colonnaded Street (see this issue's cover). A triple-arched gateway with four free-standing columns framing its western facade (shown here), it bears a strong resemblance to the triumphal arches of Rome's Severan Period (193–211 A.D.), but the Temenos Gate is thought to pre-date these structures by at least a century. Unlike most traditional Roman arches, the gate is not a triumphal monument but a true doorway—leading to the Kasr el-Bint Faroun (Palace of the Pharaoh's Daughter).

North of the Wadi Mousa were a number of important building

complexes as well, marching up the side of the rise. Bridges linked the north and south banks of the wadi—several of the platforms for the arches that supported the bridge span are extant. The most important Nabataean structure on this side of the wadi is the famed Temple of the Winged Lions, excavated by Philip Hammond of the University of Utah.[15] A much smaller temple than the Kasr el-Bint Faroun, it is of the more traditional "box-in-a-box" Nabataean type (consisting of a central altar surrounded by a screen wall), like the temples at Wadi Rumm, Khirbet Tannur and Khirbet edh-Dharih. It was nonetheless a very important structure, surrounded by a complex of courtyards, storage magazines and workshops. Clearly the building, the earliest major components of which date to the first century B.C., was part of a burgeoning temple economy. It is called the Temple of the Winged Lions because limestone capitals decorated with winged lions or griffins were discovered there. A "block idol"—a block of stone decorated with a human face—was also recovered from the ruins; it may be a cultic object dedicated to the Nabataean goddess al-Uzza (commonly associated with the Greek goddess Aphrodite and the Syrian goddess Atargatis).

Some of Petra's important Christian remains are also on the north slope of the wadi. Of mostly Byzantine date, these buildings include a spectacular church, decorated with some of the finest mosaics yet discovered in Jordan, and a baptistery. Excavated by the American Center of Oriental Research (first directed by the late Kenneth Russell, and then by Pierre Bikai, the current director of the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman, and currently by Zbigniew Fiema), the richness of this edifice is not the only testament to the prosperity of the Christian population at Petra. In an ancillary storeroom, a cache of papyrus scrolls was recovered. These may prove to be among the most important Late Antique documents ever discovered in the Holy Land.[16] Only partially deciphered (due to the extensive nature of the archive and the need for further preservation work on the papyri), the scrolls have already revealed that Byzantine Petra was a thriving city—not the dying backwater it was previously thought to be (see the second sidebar to this article).

The discovery of another church (the so-called Ridge Church), located at the very top of the wadi's north slope, along with a number of domestic structures that have only recently been found by Patricia Bikai and the American Center of Oriental Research, indicates that this region was an important part of the central city into Late Antiquity.

Probably the most important recent evidence that Petra was a city of the living comes from excavations at az-Zantur, a rocky outcrop that overlooks the southern valley of the Wadi Mousa. Here, the Swiss-Liechtenstein expedition, under the direction of Rolf Stucky and Bernhard Kolb, discovered several houses—villas, really—that tell us much about the domestic architecture of Petra's elites.[17] The earliest phases of these houses date to the late second or first centuries B.C., and later phases continue to the fourth century A.D., when the series of devastating earthquakes began. At least one of the villas was decorated with elaborate interior frescoes in a kind of local version of the Second Style of Pompeian wall painting—characterized by depictions of architectural elements that create the illusion of real structures—while others had paved courtyards

and peristyles, columns decorated with limestone Corinthian capitals and molded plaster architectural decorations. The small finds include fine pottery, coins, mosaic glass and engraved gems.

The excavations in the city center area of Petra, along with exploration of suburban areas and urban infrastructure (houses and villas in nearby Wadi Mousa village, pottery kilns, hydraulic systems, city dumps), make it abundantly clear that the old-fashioned vision of Petra as a stately necropolis must be abandoned. Since the advent of scientific excavations in the central valley under Parr and Kirkbride, modern archaeology has painted a picture of a bustling city—Nabataean, Roman, Byzantine—inhabited by thousands of people, containing streets and shops, high places and civic buildings, fountains and nymphaea, baths and theaters, cisterns and aqueducts, gardens and fora, towers and city walls, temples and churches.

People lived at Petra for thousands of years, from hunter-gatherers and the first agriculturists to the founders of the Edomite and Nabataean cultures and the subjects of the Roman and Byzantine empires. The living Petra is indeed a "rose-red city half as old as Time."

I must thank Martha Sharp Joukowsky, director of the Brown University expedition, for the opportunity she gave me to be part of this important and exciting project.

Notes

1. Scholarship on Petra is extensive. Comprehensive bibliographies can be found in Martha Sharp Joukowsky, *Petra Great Temple, Volume I: Brown University Excavations, 1993–1997* (Providence: E.A. Johnson, 1998), pp. xvi-xxxiv; Lina Nehmé, *Provisional Bibliography on Petra and the Nabataeans* (Paris: ERA 2000 CNRS, 1994); Judith McKenzie, *The Architecture of Petra* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 173–180; D. Homès-Fredericq and J.B. Hennessy, *Archaeology of Jordan*, Vol. I (Leuven: Peeters, 1986); Avraham Negev, *Tempel, Kirche, und Zisternen, Ausgrabungen in der Wüste Negev* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1983), pp. 250–254. The best introduction to the site for the general reader in English is still Iain Browning, *Petra* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982).
2. See Diana Kirkbride, "The Excavation of a Neolithic Village at Seyl Aqlat, Beidha, Near Petra," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 92 (1960), pp. 136–145; and "Beidha: Early Neolithic Life South of the Dead Sea," *Antiquity* 42 (1968), pp. 263–274.
3. See Crystal M. Bennett, "Umm el-Biyara—Pétra," *Revue biblique* 71 (1964), pp. 250–253; "Des fouilles à Umm el-Biyarah: Les Edomites à Pétra," *Bible et Terre Sainte* 84 (1966), pp. 6–16; and "Fouilles d'Umm el-Biyara. Rapport préliminaire," *Revue biblique* 73 (1966), pp. 372–403.
4. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* II, 48–49, 94–98)
5. Browning, *Petra*, p. 33.
6. See Negev, "Die Nabatäer," *Antike Welt*, supp. to vol. 7 (1976), pp. 1–80; "The Nabataeans and the Provincia Arabia," *Aufsteig und Niedergang der römischen Welt* vol. II no. 8 (1977),

pp. 520–686; "Petra," in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. IV (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993); "Nabatéens et Byzantins au Negev," *Le Monde de la Bible* 19 (1981). It is important, however, not to oversimplify Negev's very important contributions to Nabataean studies, and his theories regarding the relationship between Petra and the Nabataean sites of the Israeli Negev.

7. See Kirkbride, "A Short Account of the Excavations at Petra in 1955–1956," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 4–5 (1960), pp. 117–122; Peter Parr, "Excavations at Petra, 1958–1959," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 12 (1960), pp. 124–135. Unfortunately, no final report has been written in either of these excavations.
8. See Zbigniew Fiema, "The Roman Street in the Petra Project," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 42 (1998), pp. 395–424.
9. For a full bibliography of the Great Temple excavations to 1998, see Joukowsky, *Petra Great Temple*, pp. xxxv-xxxix. Yearly reports appear in the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* and in the "Archaeology in Jordan" feature in the *American Journal of Archaeology*.
10. For sacred theaters in the Near East, see Arthur Segal, *Theaters in Roman Palestine and Provincia Arabia* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). For other ideas on the function of the Great Temple, see Joukowsky, *Petra Great Temple*, pp. 125–128; Joseph Basile in Joukowsky, *Petra Great Temple*, p. 206; Erika Schluntz in Joukowsky, *Petra Great Temple*, pp. 220–222; and Schluntz, *From Royal to Public Assembly Space: The Transformation of the "Great Temple" Complex at Petra, Jordan*, Ph.D (Brown Univ. 1999).
11. See Leigh-Ann Bedal, "A Paradeisos in Petra: New Light on the 'Lower Market'," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 43 (1999).
12. For a full bibliography of the Temenos Gate, see McKenzie, *Architecture of Petra*, pp. 132–133.
13. See Kirkbride, "A Short Account of the Excavations at Petra in 1955–1956," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 4–5 (1960), pp. 117–122; Peter Parr, "Excavations at Petra, 1958–1959," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 12 (1960), pp. 124–135. Unfortunately, no final report has been written in either of these excavations.
14. For a full bibliography of the Kasr el-Bint Faroun, see McKenzie, *Architecture of Petra*, pp. 135–136.
15. Summarized in Philip Hammond, *The Temple of the Winged Lions, Petra, Jordan: 1974–1990* (Fountain Hills, AZ: Petra Publishers, 1996).
16. See Fiema, "The Petra Project," *American Center of Oriental Research Newsletter* 5 (1993), pp. 1–3; and "Une église byzantine à Pétra," *Archéologia* 302 (1994), pp. 26–35. The scholarly literature on this important monument (and the papyrus scrolls) is just now taking shape.
17. For the excavations until 1992, see Andrea Bignasca Rolf A. Stucky, *Petra—Ez Zantur I., and Ergebnisse der Schweizerisch-Liechtensteinischen Ausgrabungen: 1988–1992* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1996). For 1993 to the present, see the annual reports in *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* (in English).

The Lost City: Johann Ludwig Burckhardt Rediscovers Petra



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

"I hired a guide at Eldjy, to conduct me to Haroun's [Aaron's] tomb, and paid him with a pair of old horse-shoes …

In following the rivulet of Eldjy westwards, the valley soon narrows again; and it is here that the antiquities of the Wady Mousa begin. Of these, I regret that I am not able to give a very complete account: but I knew well the character of the people around me; I was without protection in the midst of a desert where no traveller had ever before been seen; and a close examination of these works of the infidels, as they are called, would have excited suspicions that I was a magician in search of treasures; I should at least have been detained and prevented from prosecuting my journey to Egypt, and in all probability should have been stripped of the little money I possessed, and what was infinitely more valuable to me, of my journal book …

[I was taken to] a spot where the valley seemed to be entirely closed by high rocks; but upon a nearer approach, I perceived a chasm about fifteen or twenty feet in breadth … which is called El Syk … After proceeding for twenty-five minutes between the rocks, we came to a place where the passage opens … On the side of the perpendicular rock, directly opposite to the issue of the main valley, an excavated mausoleum came in view, the situation and beauty of which are calculated to make an extraordinary impression upon the traveller … It is one of the most elegant remains of antiquity existing in Syria …

The principal part [of this mausoleum] is a chamber sixteen paces square, and about twenty-five feet high. There is not the smallest ornament on the walls, which are quite smooth … but the outside of the entrance door is richly embellished with architectural decorations. Several broad steps lead up to the entrance, and in front of all is a colonnade of four columns, standing between two pilasters …

The natives call this monument Kaszr Faraoun, or Pharaoh's castle [now often called the Treasury]; and pretend that it was the residence of a prince. But it was rather the sepulchre of a prince, and great must have been the opulence of the city, which could dedicate such monuments to the memory of its rulers.

From this place … the Syk widens, and the road continues for a few hundred paces lower down through a spacious passage between the two cliffs … Here to the left is a theater cut entirely out of the rock, with all its benches. It may be capable of containing about three thousand spectators … About one hundred and fifty yards further, the rocks open still farther, and I issued upon a plain two hundred and fifty or three hundred yards across … Here the ground is covered with heaps of hewn stones, foundations of buildings, fragments of columns, and vestiges of paved street; all clearly indicating that a large city once existed here …

It appears very probable that the ruins in Wady Mousa are those of the ancient *Petra* … Of this at least I am persuaded, from all the information I procured, that there is no other ruin between the extremities of the Dead sea and Red sea, of sufficient importance to answer to that city."

From Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, Travels in Syria and the Holy Land *(John Murray: London, 1822), pp. 421–431.*

Burnt Offerings: New Discoveries from the Petra Scrolls

By Jaako Frösén



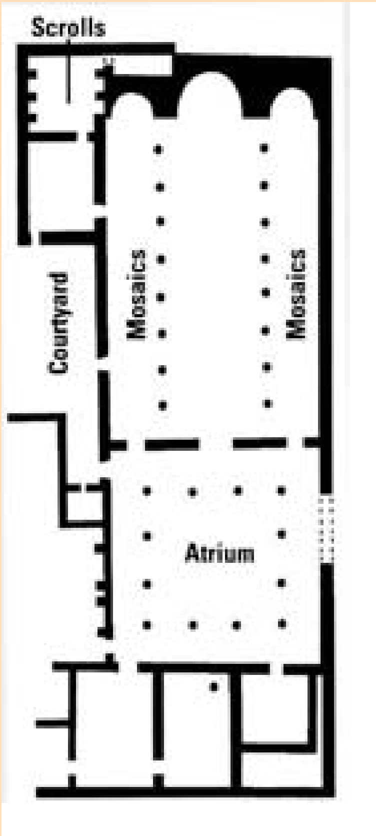
Wilson and Eleanor Myers/Acor

Discovered by archaeologist Kenneth W. Russell in 1990, Petra's sixth-century A.D. Church of St. Mary is one of the few surviving relics of Byzantine Petra. The church itself was consumed in a fire, probably sometime in the seventh century A.D., but its mosaic floor is almost perfectly preserved. In the northern aisle of the church (at left in the photo), three rows of roundels depict an assortment of animals, vessels and containers. The central panels lining the southern (right) aisle feature personifications of the seasons, the earth, the sea and wisdon. Flanking these panals are two more rows of roundels depicting animals and fish. In 1993 the church yielded a second, perhaps even more valuable treasure, when scholars found a hoard of papyrus scrolls inside a storeroom adjoining its northernmost apse.

In 1993 a team of archaeologists with the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) in Amman, Jordan, discovered a cache of 152 charred papyrus scrolls tucked away inside a building adjoining Petra's sixth-century A.D. Byzantine church.

About 3 inches wide and tightly rolled, the papyrus scrolls had been completely carbonized by a fire that consumed the church, probably in the early seventh century. Even using the most sophisticated methods, the fragile, charcoal-like documents proved impossible to unroll; the conservators painstakingly peeled away each layer of papyrus in strips and attached each strip to special acid-free tissue paper. The conservation work was completed by a team of Finnish experts in May 1995.

Once the papyri were unwound and reassembled, the conservators photographed, digitized and deciphered the documents using special lighting techniques that helped distinguish the ancient black writing from the burnt, black surface of the scrolls. After more than five years of research, two teams of American and Finnish scholars—led respectively by Ludwig Koenen of the University of Michigan and myself—have deciphered most of the 152 papyrus scrolls.



Plan of Petra's sixth-century A.D. Church of St. Mary (compare with photo of Church of St. Mary).

Written between 537 and 592 A.D., these scrolls shed new light on one of the murkiest eras in Petra's history. Until recently, almost nothing was known about Petra in the Byzantine period. Conventional wisdom held that the city entered a period of gradual economic and cultural decline after it was annexed by the Romans in the second century A.D. and was subsequently Christianized. A severe earthquake in 363 was thought to have destroyed a good deal of the city, and a second devastating quake was supposed to have led to its final abandonment in 551.

Most of the documents in our archive, however, date after the earthquake of 551—suggesting that Petra was by no means entirely abandoned. On the contrary, the documents paint a picture of a prosperous city with a vigorous, agriculturally based economy.

Written almost entirely in Greek (with a few lines in Latin), the texts found in the church are all economic and legal documents. They include contracts, wills, settlements of property disputes, and property registrations. Many of the records relate to one prominent local family, but the scrolls mention numerous people and places both within and outside of Petra. One of the scrolls has even helped us identify the church where the records were found; it refers to the building as the Church of St. Mary at Petra.

The key figure of the archive is a certain Theodoros, son of Obodianos, who served as the archdeacon of the Church of St. Mary and may also have been the bishop of Petra. Theodoros's family originally came from the town of Kastron Zadakathon (modern Sadaqa), some 13 miles southeast of Petra, but Theodoros also seems to have owned land and administered property west of Petra in the Dead Sea Rift. One scroll, for example, was written at Gaza and reports on the archdeacon's holdings in Eleutheropolis (modern Beit Jibrin, close to Jerusalem). Casual references to property near the Mediterranean coast make it clear that sixth-century Petra was not cut off from caravan and pilgrim routes, as many scholars previously maintained.

The texts also show a surprising persistence of Nabataean culture during the Byzantine period. Traditional Nabataean names continue to appear among the more common Greek, Roman and Christian names. For example, the name Obodianos is derived from the Nabataean king name Obodas; another name, Dusarios, retains the name of the Nabataean god Dushara (or Dusaras).



The 152 burnt black scrolls and scroll fragments that make up the petra papyri appear to have been part of the private archive of the archdeacon of the Church of St. Mary. Legal and economic documents dating from 537 to 592 A.D., the scrolls describe landholdings and business transactions both in and around Petra. The remarkable assortment of people and places named in the documents has convinced most scholars that Petra was not completely abandoned after earthquakes in the mid-forth and sixth centuries A.D.

This suggests that even though Nabataean writing was no longer used after the fourth century A.D., the Nabataeans themselves did not disappear. Probably they adjusted to Roman rule, adopted Greek as their official language and converted to Christianity, while still maintaining certain elements of their culture, including traditional Nabataean names.

One of the scrolls, dating from 573, contains six copies of the last will and testament of another Obodianos, son of Obodianos. According to this document, Obodianos (junior) fell ill and promised all his belongings to two local charitable institutions. One was a church or monastery identified simply as the House of the Saint High Priest Aaron. (The biblical Aaron is traditionally thought to be buried near Petra.) The location of this house is not specified in the text (though we now believe we have identified the site), but its legal interests were represented by the presbyter of the monastery or church, Kyrikos, son of Petros. The other beneficiary was the Hospital of the Saint Martyr Kyrikos in Petra, represented by the archive's key figure, Theodoros, who was probably the brother of the ill Obodianos.

This document (Scroll Number 6 in the register) is noteworthy for its very early references to both a monastery (if it really was a monastery) and a hospital. The Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai—generally regarded as the Near East's oldest monastery—was known as a dwelling for monks as early as 300 A.D., but its central enclosed compound and outer fortifications were built by Emperor Justinian in 548 A.D., less than 30 years before this scroll was written. Similarly, the systematic building of hospitals in the region is not thought to have begun until sometime after the widespread famine of 536 and the great plague of 542. Did Byzantine Petra house one of Transjordan's first important monasteries and one of its first hospitals?

Some of us who have been involved in conserving and deciphering the Petra scrolls are now trying to relate the texts to their topographical surroundings and the

many unexamined archaeological remains in and around Petra. The Jabul Harun [Mount Aaron] Archaeological Project—a new Finnish excavation project led by Zbigniew Fiema and myself—has now identified a complex of buried buildings just below the summit of Mount Aaron that is almost certainly the House of St. High Priest Aaron monastery mentioned in Scroll Number 6. During our first season of fieldwork, we found a large church with mosaics and a chapel with "Aaron" inscribed on a marble orthostat found near its altar.

Photo courtesy of Jaako Frösén



This photo shows an example of one of the scroll fragments that makes up the petra papyri.

Around the sides of the mountain, we also uncovered an extensive riverbed and terrace irrigation system, complete with dams and cisterns. This may be the largest terraced irrigation system in southern Palestine from this period. These finds suggest that Mount Aaron was probably the site of a major Byzantine pilgrimage center. In future excavations, we hope to determine the exact relationship of this building complex to the nearby city of Petra.

We also plan to continue our papyrological studies of the scrolls themselves. The first volume of our translations is almost ready for publication, but the remaining decipherment and publication process will take at least another five years. Meanwhile, we still do not know why these papyri were deposited in a storage room adjacent to the church. Was this chamber actually part of some larger official building, such as the residence of a bishop? Are the Petra scrolls only one small part of a much larger archive or library? If so, maybe there are more carbonized books and records waiting to be found.